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GRADIUS

IN THE CHAIR WITH…
STEVE CROW
"I WOULD HAVE LOVED TO HAVE WRITTEN A SEQUEL TO STARQUAKE"

THE MAKING OF…
FRENZY
BEHIND THE SCENES OF THE CULT STERN COIN-OP

THE BIG FEATURE
FALLOUT
THE ORIGINAL DEVELOPERS DISCUSS THEIR APOCALYPTIC FRANCHISE



IN THIS ISSUE OF RETRO GAMER

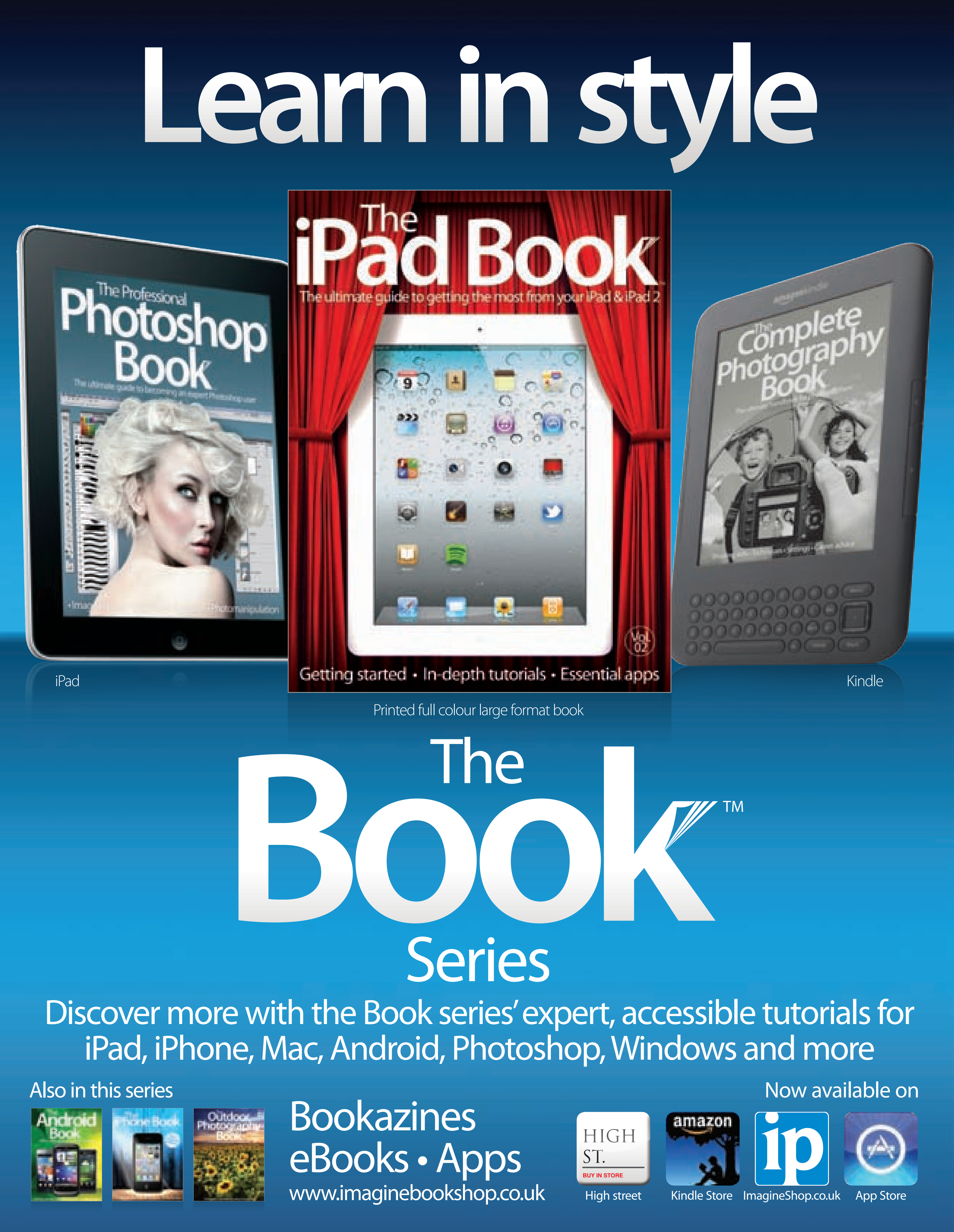
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THE MACHINE THAT KICK-STARTED THE SUCCESS OF SIR CLIVE SINCLAIR

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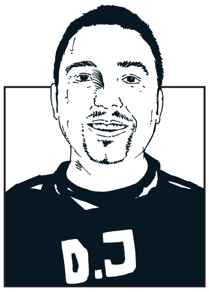
MYSTICAL NINJA
WHY KONAMI'S SNES PLATFORMER IS ONE OF THE FUNNIEST GAMES AROUND

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THE RETROBATES

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE STEPHEN CROW GAME?



DARRAN JONES
Call me sad and predictable, but I'm plumping for *Starquake*. I loved Ultimate games and this was the next best thing while waiting for another Stamper fix.
Expertise:
Juggling a wife, two beautiful girls and **Retro Gamer**
Currently playing:
Monster Hunter Freedom Unite
Favourite game of all time:
Robotron: 2084



STUART HUNT
As much as I love *Earthworm Jim*, I'm going to go with *Starquake*. It oozes charm, character and enjoyment from every pixel, and I think I'll always hold a special place in my heart for Blob.
Expertise:
Games with flying bits in them
Currently playing:
Assassin's Creed II
Favourite game of all time:
Assassin's Creed II



JASON KELK
It's got to be *Zynaps* on the Spectrum. Incredibly hard but rewarding with it.
Expertise:
Failing to start playground fights.
Currently playing:
Zybex (Atari 8-bit)
Favourite game of all time:
Io



CRAIG GRANNELL
It wasn't the most original game, but *Starquake* had great attention to detail, with colourful, engaging graphics – notably Blob, the main character – and a huge map to explore.
Expertise:
Games you don't need 37 fingers to control
Currently playing:
Cows In Space and *Soosiz*
Favourite game of all time:
H.E.R.O.



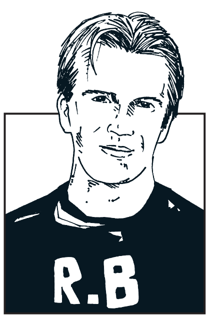
PAUL DRURY
Aladdin on the Mega Drive. Whenever I did the level skip I'd start singing *What's The Name Of The Game*. Sad, really.
Expertise:
Sage IV floppies
Currently playing:
Lego Rock Band
Favourite game of all time:
Sheep In Space



DAVID CROOKES
It has to be *Turbo OutRun* on the Speccy. Before I got my very first car – a gleaming Vauxhall Nova – I could dream of one day owning that Ferrari F40. Vroom.
Expertise: All things Amstrad CPC, *Dizzy*, Atari Lynx and PlayStation
Currently playing:
Assassin's Creed II
Favourite game of all time:
Broken Sword

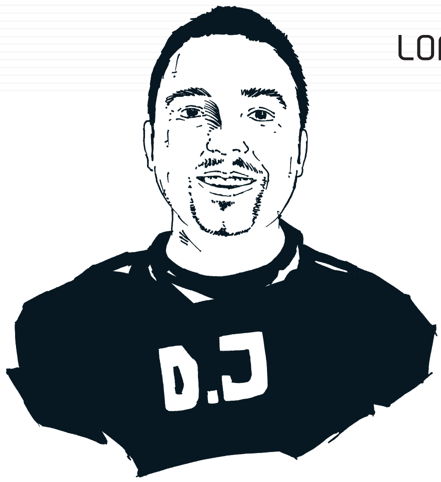


MARTYN CARROLL
I loved *Firelord* on the Speccy. I always thought of it as an unofficial follow-up to *Sabre Wulf*, with more things to see and do. And anyone who ever played it will remember the thrill of trying to rob stuff from the shop.
Expertise:
Small form micros
Currently playing:
Battlefield 1943
Favourite game of all time:
Jet Set Willy



RICHARD BURTON
Starquake had beautiful graphics and strong gameplay but was undermined by comparisons to Ultimate games. Although graphically similar, *Starquake* was arguably more playable than any Ultimate offering.
Expertise:
Stuff, nonsense and stuff
Currently playing:
Who Dares Wins 2
Favourite game of all time:
Manic Miner

LOADING...



I was reading a post on the forum the other day about how people are getting excited about Retro Gamer's 100th issue – it's apparently due June 2012 – and it scared the hell out of me. I'm the sort of person who rarely knows what he's doing from one day to the next, so the thought that people are already expecting monumental things from the centenary issue worries me more than a little.

On the other hand, it shows just how passionate readers are, which makes all the hard work we put in totally worth it. Yes, we have our detractors, but when I see how much loyal support we're still receiving after all this time, it just pushes me on to make it as good as possible.

Now I'm not really one for resolutions, mainly because I usually forget them by noon on the day I've made them, but I will promise you that **Retro Gamer** will continue to go from strength to strength in the new year and beyond. To prove that, you hold in your hands a truly cracking issue that not only features a much-requested interview with the reclusive Stephen Crow, but also solves an unanswered question about the Spectrum conversion of *Gradius*/*Nemesis* that has been bothering owners for 22 years.

Enjoy the magazine.





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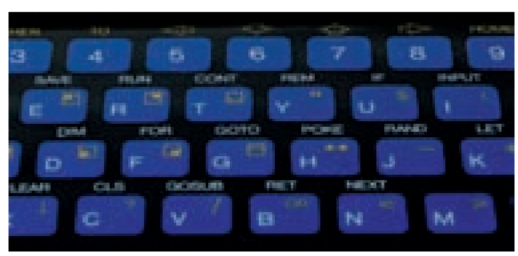
» **Load 72** Breathing new life into classic games

FEATURED



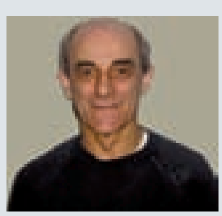
RETRO REVIVALS

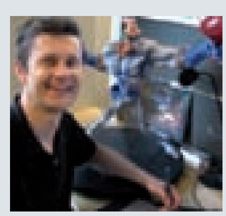




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"Bursts with character and diversity" Stuart Hunt



40 Classic Game

Stuart Hunt boots up his SNES and attempts to unravel the mystery that is Konami's *The Legend Of The Mystical Ninja*

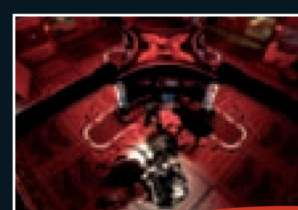
58 A DECADE OF FALLOUT

The original developers discuss their hit isometric RPG's early beginnings and how they feel about Bethesda's impressive sequel

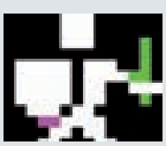


ESSENTIALS

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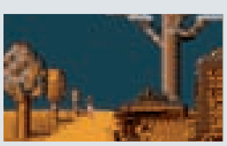


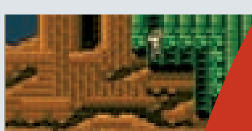
retro GAMER.net READER'S REVIVAL



22 FAXANADU

Retro Gamer reader Romany Woodhouse explains why he enjoys Hudson Soft's excellent and underrated NES adventure.





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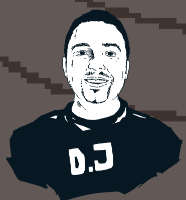
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» GIVE US TWO MINUTES AND WE'LL GIVE YOU THE RETRO WORLD



» It's another month of retro revivals. There's news of an Xbox Live Arcade release of Capcom's Final Fight and Magic Sword, while Sega is readying a brand new DS compilation featuring Sonic The Hedgehog. Will it feature Sonic CD, though?

CONTENTS



» Why do developers insist on using this awful smoothing effect? We may never know.



GO DEEPER

» *Final Fight* was first released in arcades in 1989

» Both Cody and Guy are due to appear in *Super Street Fighter IV* on the PS3 and Xbox 360

» Poison and Roxy are actually pre-op transgender women. They were taken out of the English ports

FIGHT ANOTHER DAY…

AS CAPCOM GETS READY TO UNLEASH TWO CLASSICS FROM ITS BACK CATALOGUE IN HD, DAVID CROOKES TALKS TO DEVELOPER CHRIS WRIGHT

A new decade, a new era. And, for retro fight fans, a pleasant treat: the announcement that Capcom will be releasing a new pack for Xbox Live Arcade and PSN in April, combining old-school classics *Final Fight* and *Magic Sword*.

The new pack will offer versions of the side-scrolling titles but with improved HD visuals. It will also include classic and arcade cabinet modes, allowing gamers to play the titles in their original form.

What's more, however, it shows Capcom's continued desire to plunge into its back catalogue and refresh old franchises. What started as a decision to revamp *Final Fight* ended with a search for a suitable game to bundle with it and, after a two-week study, *Magic Sword* ended up tops. From that point on, Dundee-based Proper Games, well-known for its original title *Flock*, cracked on with getting the games in shape.

"*Magic Sword* felt like a really good companion title that would go alongside *Final Fight*," says Chris Wright, COO of Proper Games. "Both games are co-operative multiplayer, while having two games that are so visually and tonally different makes for a really nice package that hopefully appeals to fans of both games."

Final Fight was originally released in the arcades in 1989, put together by game designer Akira Nishitani and character designer Akira Yasuda. The side-scrolling beat-'em-up involved martial artist Cody and his friend Guy setting out to rescue the mayor's daughter from the hands of kidnap gang Mad Gear, and it spawned two sequels in 1993 and 1995.

> **"Having two games that are so different makes for a really nice package that appeals to fans"**

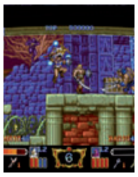
Magic Sword was a side-scrolling fantasy arcade game released in 1990. Character design is similar to *Street Fighter II* and, while it's naturally a hard game to find in the arcades nowadays, its return to consoles will be very welcome indeed.

Yet some gamers have asked Capcom why *Final Fight 2* and *3* are not being bundled in the new pack instead of *Magic Sword*. "Most people forget that *Final Fight 2* and *3* were both SNES exclusives," answers Chris. "So we'd have to emulate two entirely different machines: the CPS1 board and the SNES; obviously an expensive and time-consuming challenge."

Capcom is looking to keep the games as true to the originals as

And there's more…

» More information about Final Fight: Double Impact



Multiplayer

As well as a Vault full of unlockable content, both *Final Fight* and *Magic Sword* will feature drop-in online multiplayer. Capcom is using GGPO as the underlying technology, which replicates the arcade experience without having to sit next to someone with poor hygiene. "We do recommend that players find a half-full ashtray to sit near to get the true experience," laughs Chris.

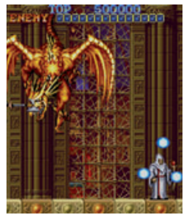
He says it was a real challenge to work around the constraints of the old games, as well as those of these new machines. "Making a multiplayer game that runs on bespoke hardware compatible with the modern hardware but also modern gamers' expectations has been challenging," he adds.



iPhone games?

Although there are no current plans for the enhanced versions of *Final Fight* and *Magic Sword* to be ported to the iPhone, the possibility is certainly there.

"The iPhone offers a great platform for delivering games such as *Final Fight* and *Magic Sword*," says Chris. "Right now we haven't been asked by Capcom to develop for other platforms, but we would certainly be happy to do so. Working to bring such classic and well-regarded IP to new audiences, whatever the host hardware, is always an honour."



Happy Easter

Both *Final Fight* and *Magic Sword* have a few little hidden Easter eggs for players laced into the games.

"We'd love to hear from anyone who manages to spot them," smiles Chris. "But the funniest thing to happen over the course of development was probably the delivery of a lot of the source concept art. When file names are translated into 'Engrish', it always raises a giggle or two. 'Rizardman', anyone? We'd also like to say that it is well worth getting good at *Final Fight* – there's a truly special treat in the Vault for anyone who gets a particularly high score in Uptown…"



» While there are plenty of secrets to unlock, it's the sheer authenticity that impresses us the most.

possible. It wanted to give players access to as much material as it could through what is called the Vault, but it also wanted to allow people to play multiplayer as if they were playing on an actual machine in an arcade, and it wanted to make the visuals as close to the original as possible.

"The aim wasn't to just do a quick emulation, but provide something for the fans that they will really appreciate," says Chris. "Every fan has a memory of their favourite games stuck away somewhere, and usually it is a bit rose-tinted. We've tried to make it how you remember, with the option of turning the reality switch back on."

So the graphics have been upscaled to HD and Capcom has spent a lot of time looking at what other companies had done when remaking classics. "We're massive fans of the retro scene," says Chris. "To be honest, what we want is to play the original. We decided to try and recreate the experience you got standing in front of the arcade machine."

Complementing the new visuals is a new soundtrack adapted by the highly acclaimed composers responsible for *Bionic Commando Rearmed*. The developer has gone for a 3D front end and the ability to play the games in a cabinet view. It has also implemented some neat effects, designed to simulate an old CRT using scan lines and phosphor burn, making a modern HDTV look like you are playing on an old arcade cabinet with a CRT screen.

It was the first time the development team had written an arcade emulator. The team started by deconstructing the original machines. "We spent a lot of time looking at old Capcom information, and the original source code," says Chris. "This was very interesting in an extremely geeky sort of way! Once we got the core emulation running it was comparatively easy to 'plug' the two games in and get them running properly."

Capcom believes that changing attitudes have meant there has been a surge of interest in older games in recent years. "The games industry is still very young – it's less than 40 years old – and compared to film or music we have very little history," Chris says. "What is interesting is that the attitude is changing; for a long time it was felt that games were so driven by technology that looking back was almost pointless. This attitude is changing; people are starting to look at games for what they are and not the technology that they run on and realising that a classic game is still a classic game. This is the first generation to really encourage this, and people are now exposed to some amazing games from our past. This can only be good for the industry." *

THE RETRO DEBATE

» Are you looking forward to Final Fight: Double Impact?

VISIT RETROGAMER.NET/FORUM TO HAVE YOUR SAY

The vulture
Even more excited when I got more details. Sweet. Bring it on, Capcom baby.

flying_delorean81
This is excellent news. Can't wait for this! I just hope the European PSN doesn't get forgotten about by Sony on this one.

Mainvein
That's great news. *Final Fight* is one of my favourite arcade games of all time. I used to play it all the time in my local video shop. It would be great if they decided to update some of their other side scrollers too like *Captain Commando*, *The Punisher* and *Cadillacs And Dinosaurs*. Just hope they don't go too far in the wrong direction when trying to update it like *Turtles In Time*. I loved the original but hated the remake.

C=Style
This could be good! But I'll wait until I see it in action before I get too excited. It could go either way.

Felgekarp
Yeah, roll on April. Hopefully it'll be no *Double Dragon*-style update.

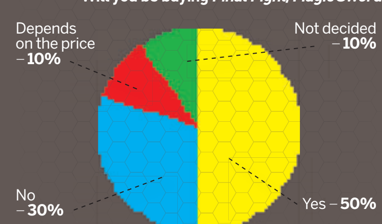
Shinobi
One of my favourite games ever. Just hope they don't ruin it like they did with the *Turtles* and keep the 2D gameplay, enemy placement and infinite punch cheat, etc.

LostSUNDAY
Would have been happier if it was *Streets Of Rage II*. But I like *Final Fight* too. Just hope they don't drop the ball.

witchfinder
While I love the original *Final Fight*, scrolling beat-'em-ups really were of their time, and I'm not sure I'd be willing to shell out on a new version just because of some snazzy graphics. Of course, if they add some nice extras I may be tempted, but definitely a 'wait and see' game for me…

FORUM OPINION

Will you be buying *Final Fight/Magic Sword*?



retrocolumns

» RETRO RECOLLECTIONS WITH CELEB IAIN LEE

Here's the bio...
Iain Lee has been a fervent gamer since he was tiny. And that was a long time ago. In between playing computer games and collecting crap from eBay, he has presented Channel 4's *The 11 O'Clock Show* and *Rise*, and currently does bits of stand-up as well as presenting the *2 Hour Long Late Night Radio Show* on Absolute Radio at 11pm.



Hi there, my name's **Iain Lee**. You might remember me from Thumb Bandits, The 11 O'Clock Show and Absolute Radio, but now I'm here to confess my love for retro

How is a 14-year-old supposed to navigate a complex world when all he can do is 'Go west'?

RG Adventures   Score: 72   Moves: 15

You are in a room. To the east there is a door. You can see a table in front of you.

> Look table
The table is old and worn. On it is an apple core and a copy of Retro Gamer magazine.

> Get Retro
You now have a copy of Retro Gamer magazine.

> Go east
You are standing in a beautiful forest. You can hear the sounds of birds singing in the trees and, in the distance, rushing water. A dwarf is sitting on a branch. He is wearing a bright green hat and at his feet is a set of bagpipes. There is something mystical about him.

> Speak dwarf
"Hello, middle-aged man. I see you have the latest issue of Retro Gamer there. Congratulations. In it you will find many secrets about the past. However, it has been a while since they did a piece on text-based adventures, so let me fill you in on some details. Would you like to know more?"

> Say yes
"Good. Kids these days don't have a clue about text-based adventures. They are a sadly neglected and overlooked part of videogame history. A lot of them were truly awful affairs. Does anyone remember Madness And The Minotaur? Some were wonderfully scripted and clever – may I refer thee to The Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy? But all of them – ALL OF THEM – were bloody frustrating and hard work. Imagine inhabiting a world where everything operates on a verb/noun parser system. Damn, I don't even know what a parser is! How is a 14-year-old supposed to navigate a complex, mystical world when all he can do is 'Go west', 'Hit man' and 'Get ball'? Now, if you'll excuse me, I need to play these pipes." The dwarf picks up his bagpipes and starts to play. It is an unholy noise.

> Speak dwarf
The dwarf is too lost in his music to speak.

> Hit dwarf
The dwarf does not like that.

> F**k dwarf
The dwarf does not like that.

> Go east
You are in a clearing in the forest. You can see two teenage boys looking at a television screen. A man who appears to be their father is typing words into a BBC Micro. He looks very happy. The two children look very bored.

> Speak man
"Hello. I'm trying to show my two sons how exciting a text-based adventure can be. Because there are no graphics, the fantasy has to take place in your mind. It's all very cerebral, helps them with problem-solving and allows them to project their own image on the hero – they become the star of the game. Marvellous fun." The man returns to the keyboard and slowly types two words into the machine. "This should do it. Bugger. Why can't I open that door?"

> Speak children
"Hey, have you got a PSP or DSi on you? Dad wants us to look at Bored Of The Rings – he says it's a hilarious pastiche of The Hobbit and Lord Of The Rings. But really, it's rubbish. We want fast graphics, loud sounds and action. Typing is well bent."

> Go east
You travel through the forest. You fall down a well. You are dead.

> Try again Y/N?

Game you're most looking forward to in 2010? I haven't got a clue what's coming out. I'm getting *L4D2* for Christmas and that will keep me happy for at least six months.



CLASSIC REVIEWER



BIO

Name:
Paul Glancey
First Magazine:
Zzap!64
Role:
Staff Writer
Favourite Game:
Diablo II
Favourite System:
Mega Drive

Favourite game?
Way too many to list, but now I'm involved in game design let's just say I will always admire the skill progression system in *Diablo II*.

Favourite system?
I owe my career to the Commodore 64, but the Mega Drive kept it going.

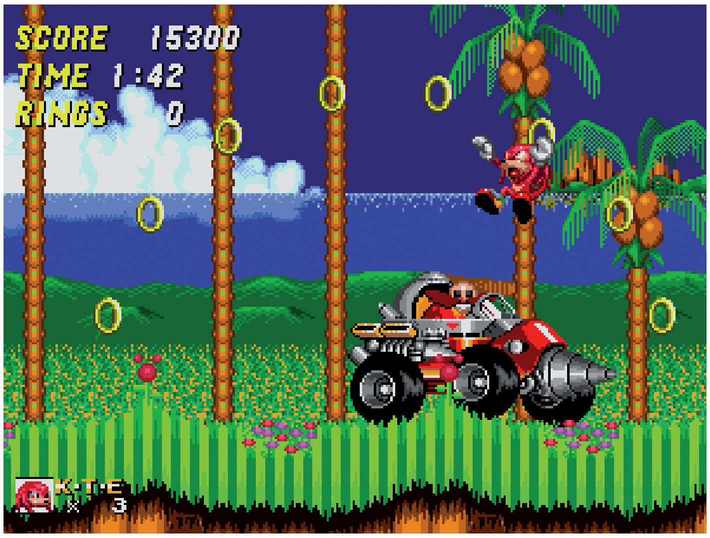
Best press trip you've been on?
The 1990 Paris games show trip we went on when US Gold were sponsoring the UK videogames team. I got roped into the team at the last minute to play *Super Mario Bros*, and we ended up winning the title!

Best mag you've worked on?
Computer & Video Games. I had the honour of working on the original videogames magazine.

Best person you've met in the videogame industry?
Julian Rignall.

Magazine you would like to have worked on?
I was lucky enough to work on all the magazines I would ever have liked to.

How do you feel games magazines changed over the years?
I've got two words for you: 'the' and 'internet'. There's so much competition from foreign sites, professional news sites and amateur blogs. Nowadays you have to work a lot harder at establishing a unique voice if you want people to actually pay money at a news stand to read about games.



SONIC GOES PORTABLE

SEGA'S MASCOT HEADS TO THE DS

Big news this month as Sega has revealed plans to bring out a brand new compilation starring everyone's favourite supersonic blue hedgehog. *Sonic Classic Collection* will be heading to the DS early next year and is set to include four classic Mega Drive games from the long-running franchise: *Sonic The Hedgehog, Sonic The Hedgehog 2, Sonic The Hedgehog 3* and *Sonic & Knuckles*.

Sega has said little more about the compilation, other than that it will be fully optimised to run on the DS, which means that you'll at least be able to save them whenever you want to and won't have to worry about sitting through each included game in a single play, which is handy for a handheld version. In addition, there will be some new video content.

While this is admittedly great news for *Sonic* fans, we can't help but wonder why only four games appear to be on this compilation. After all, Mega Drive games aren't huge in size, so there's no reason why more couldn't be added, which would make this even better value for money.

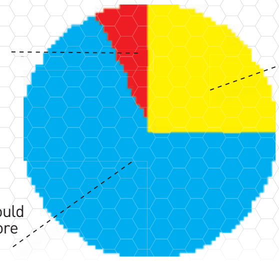
Of course, it's still a few months before Sega releases the compilation, so it might be announcing more games nearer the time in order to sustain interest. Still, if this doesn't at least feature the excellent *Sonic CD* and titles like *Sonic Spinball*, we can easily see the hardcore *Sonic* fans being quite disappointed.

With the recent announcement of *Project Needlemouse* and this new compilation, 2010 could well become the year of the hedgehog. Here's hoping that a few more games get revealed or that it at least comes with a budget price tag. *

FORUM OPINION

VISIT RETROGAMER.NET/FORUM TO HAVE YOUR SAY

Will you buy Sonic Classic Collection?



Just make a good new *Sonic* game and I can forgive these infinite retreads! **– the_hawk**

Every time a new collection is released it makes me wonder: is Sega admitting that it has nothing good to release now, but just repackaged goods from a golden age gone by? **– Cauterize**

I've got some for my Mega Drive but not all of them, and it'll be nice to play them on the bus into college **– Nat91**

MICRO BYTES

Snippets of news from the exciting world of retro



Latest YouTube News

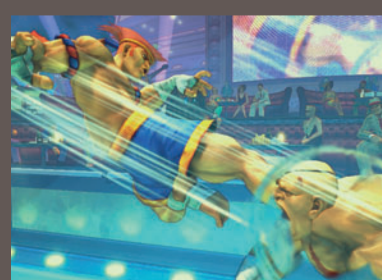
www.youtube/users/retrogamerdaz

Darran's been rather busy this month on his YouTube channel. He's stirred up a bit of a hornet's nest with his rant about questionable downloadable content and whether it actually offers decent value for money and has also found time to post some videos of all his latest Dreamcast games. Look out for the return of *Clash Of The Titans* as well.



After Burner to return?

According to the Australian and Korean classification boards, Sega has recently registered its excellent *After Burner Climax* for a home console release. No news yet as to who is in charge of porting duties – Sumo, please – but we reckon that this excellent shooter would have more success if it was released as a digital download for PSN and Xbox Live Arcade. More news soon.



More Street Fighters

Capcom has announced three more characters that will be joining the roster of *Super Street Fighter IV*. All three characters are from the *Street Fighter Alpha* series and are Adon and *Final Fight*'s Cody and Guy. All three fighters look amazing in their transition from 2D to 3D, with Adon's super in particular looking absolutely fantastic. Here's hoping that *Street Fighter III*'s Hugo makes it across.

retrocolumns

» PAUL DAVIES GIVES HIS VIEWS ON THE RETRO WORLD

Here's my bio...
In 1992 I started out on *Mean Machines Sega* and *Nintendo Magazine System*. In 1995 I became editor of *C&VG*. I led the *C&VG* website from 1998 until Christmas 2000, then I left journalism to be concept design manager at Criterion Games. I returned to journalism in 2002 and from 2005 I've been running my own company, Unlikely Hero.



Hello, retro gamers. My name is **Paul Davies**. I used to be the editor of C&VG and have also worked on a number of classic gaming magazines over the years

New Year Higher Resolutions

Happy new year! What have you been playing? Me, I'd set aside the latest *Uncharted* and *Zelda: Spirit Tracks*. My Christmas games have become a tradition.

It's weird going into 2010 without much of a sniff of new gaming hardware. Spending time at my folks' this Christmas, I remembered that this time of year often meant the latest videogame marvel infiltrating the living room. I vividly remember the thrill of receiving my *Pac-Man* LED miniature arcade cabinet, playing it for hours on end. Loved it.

Convincing my parents to invest in a BBC Model B – very swish – is another high point of my childhood Chrimbos. When the relatives were over I'd show them *Colossal Cave Adventure*, expecting they'd be amazed. They probably thought they were looking at Ceefax. *Snooker* went down okay, though, and even Dad was hooked.

Embarrassing though it is to admit, I realise that every couple of years since the Eighties I've been disrupting my bemused older relatives' festivities with whatever I believed was exciting and next in videogames. An imported PlayStation with *Ridge Racer* – plus a clutter of wires and a step-down transformer melting the carpet – felt like I was bringing home a top secret prototype from NASA. 'It's amazing! Can you believe it?'

The last event was the Nintendo Wii. Thankfully everyone could see the fun of that, even though, for the first time, I thought that the graphics were completely terrible. Having won everybody over with *Wii Sports*, I assumed they'd love watching *Zelda* for a few hours. Strangely, that didn't quite work out.

Despite realising I've been a bit of an idiot all these years, having the smell of new plastic competing with the Christmas turkey was always a huge occasion for me, providing momentum for another 12 months of gaming. Bizarre early games showing future potential, and then just as you've reached the pinnacle – *Revs* on the Beeb, *Final Fantasy VII* on the PSone… – the new stuff was just arriving.

So, 2010 is kind of weird in this respect because unless you're counting the iPhone as the next big thing in gaming, we're left to depend on pure creativity from publishers. On the one hand, this is a bit miserable because the consoles are getting dustier and the controllers are getting crusty. But we could find ourselves looking back on this generation more fondly than anything else. We're having time to appreciate the best of these machines.

And you know what? Part of the original excitement with consoles such as the Atari VCS was that you thought this was going to be it forever. Who was ever going to top *Pitfall*? What could be more engrossing than *The Hobbit*? *Elite*: nothing more engrossing since.

Games are going to get better than *Uncharted 2*. That's good enough for me.

> You thought this was going to be it forever. Who was ever going to top Pitfall?

What was your bestselling issue of *C&VG*? It had *Star Wars* on the cover. The thing that really sold it was a VHS tape with PlayStation games previewed. Yes, a VHS tape.

A PRINCE AMONG GAMES

UBISOFT ANNOUNCES THE RETURN OF EVERYONE'S FAVOURITE PRINCE

The recent *Prince Of Persia* games have been something of a bittersweet experience. While the original *Sands Of Time* proved to be an excellent swashbuckling adventure – no doubt due to the huge input from creator Jordan Mechner – later games in the original trilogy just weren't up to the same standard. Ubisoft's cel-shaded reboot was a step in the right direction, but it still failed to capture the sheer magnificence of *Sands Of Time*.

Here's hoping, then, that the recently announced *Prince Of Persia: The Forgotten Sands* is a return to the brilliance of *Sands Of Time*. No doubt released to tie in with the upcoming movie, which stars Jake Gyllenhaal, *The Forgotten Sands* is currently due to appear in May, with Ubisoft promising the return of "fan-favourite elements" along with brand new gameplay. Little else has been said, but that hasn't stopped speculation spreading across the internet with all the speed of a red-slippered hedgehog.

The most popular rumour is that *Forgotten Sands* will essentially be a high-definition retread of the first three games in the *Sands Of Time* trilogy, with Ubisoft grabbing the best bits from each title, while others are simply hoping for an HD remake of the original game, especially as it suffers from technical issues when played on a 360.

While Ubisoft's lips are remaining firmly sealed about the subject, the first notion that this will be a rejigged version currently holds the most water, particularly as the film, which is due at the end of the same month, incorporates elements from the second two games as well.

We'll have to keep guessing for the moment, but providing Ubisoft can get Mechner back on board and listens to the criticism surrounding the last few games, there should be little to worry about. And if there is, there's always the first *Sands Of Time* to return to, or better yet, Mechner's 1989 original.

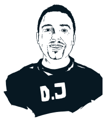




» [PC] *The Sands Of Time* was a wonderful gaming experience. Here's hoping that *The Forgotten Sands* is up to a similar standard.

WHAT WE THINK

Darran



While I'd love a return to the original *Sands Of Time*, I'm worried on the quick announcement. On the other hand, Rare used to use this tactic all the time back in the day and look how good its games were.

Stuart



I'm not really a huge fan of *Prince Of Persia*. If this new game is a tie-in with the movie, with Jake Gyllenhaal starring in an unbalanced action title held together by set pieces from the movie, this one is unlikely to change my opinion.

David



Having spent a fair chunk of my life playing the latest *Prince Of Persia*, I had been hoping for a blistering sequel. Alas, it appears it may have been canned in favour of a follow-up to the excellent *Sands* series. Excited? Too right.



WHAT IF?

Your favourite current-gen games remade, retro-style

Subject No 6

LittleBigPlanet

LEVEL EDITING AND game creation tools were all the rage on the 8-bit computers, so we reckon that Media Molecule's PS3 platformer *LittleBigPlanet* would have gone down a storm. Of course, due to the Spectrum's capabilities, the online multiplayer mode would have been completely out of the question, but we could easily see gamers creating their levels then backing them up on a C90 – along with several other games, of course – to play at their friend's house.



» [Spectrum] It doesn't matter what system he's on; Sackboy always looks as cute as a proverbial button.

Retro Booty

TREASURES FROM THE RETRO DEEP



Space Harrier T-Shirt

- **RRP:** £9.99
- **Manufacturer:** RetroGT
- **Buy it from:** www.retrogt.com

If you enjoyed our Coin-op Capers feature on *Space Harrier* and rediscovered your love for the game, why not express that newly re-found appreciation by purchasing this T-shirt and screaming 'Welcome to the Fantasy Zone!' in a busy street? Or simply just buy this shirt.

Pac-Man Sweets

- **RRP:** £5.99
- **Manufacturer:** Giftstuff
- **Buy it from:** www.giftstuff.co.uk

We rarely feature sweets in this section, but that's because we seldom see any as cool as these. While the price is quite high, you do get three funky tins that can be used to store all sorts of stuff. The sweets themselves come in raspberry, orange and sour cherry flavours.





Yoshi Key Ring

- **RRP:** £3.49
- **Manufacturer:** Nintendo
- **Buy it from:** www.play.com

We love Yoshi, and now Nintendo has created a key ring so that you can carry the lovable little dinosaur wherever you go. Several other characters are available including Mario, Luigi and Princess Peach, but Yoshi is definitely our favourite. Great price as well.

Pac-Boy Retro Heat Change Mug

- **Price:** £5.99
- **Manufacturer:** Paladone
- **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk

Looking for a vessel to store small volumes of boiling hot liquids? Then look no further than this stylish heat-changing mug. It's decorated with an empty *Pac-Man* maze… that is until you add hot water, then voila! The sprites magically appear.



Mario Cement Factory Game

- **RRP:** £9.46
- **Manufacturer:** Zappies Ltd
- **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk

If you happen to be in some kind of relationship with the world's biggest *Mario Cement Factory* fan then why not pick them up this LCD key ring so they can play it 24/7? It even comes with two batteries so that the gaming can begin without delay.





Sonic Racing System

- **RRP:** £9.99
- **Manufacturer:** Impact
- **Buy it from:** www.play.com

Considering his love of speed, it's surprising that it's taken us so long to discover a *Sonic* racing game. It's also surprising to discover that there are no loop-the-loops to race through and that the track isn't painted green. Still, you can't really moan for a tenner, and it does include Tails.

Hori Fighting Stick

- **RRP:** £39.99
- **Manufacturer:** Hori
- **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk

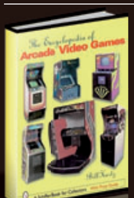
With there being a sort of renaissance within the beat-'em-up genre of late, there is no better time to purchase yourself a fight stick. And this one for the PS3 by Hori, which includes individual turbo settings and three play modes, is one of the best your money can find.



TREASURE OF THE MONTH

The Encyclopedia Of Arcade Video Games

- **RRP:** £34.99
- **Author:** Bill Kurtz
- **Buy it from:** www.amazon.com



This hardback was first released in 2005, but it's such a lavish production that more readers should know about it.

Published by Schiffer Publishing, this sumptuous 240-page tome may be light on text, but it offers an astonishing glimpse into the arcade scene of old. Crammed with a dazzling array of classics, it's like a who's who of every popular machine. Favourites are all featured, but Kurtz has also included rarer machines as well. In total there are over 600 photos, as well as information about collecting.

Some of the information is admittedly a little out of date now, but if you're looking for a gorgeous book that instantly transports you back to your youth then you won't find anything better. Highly recommended.



Mega Man X Official Complete Works

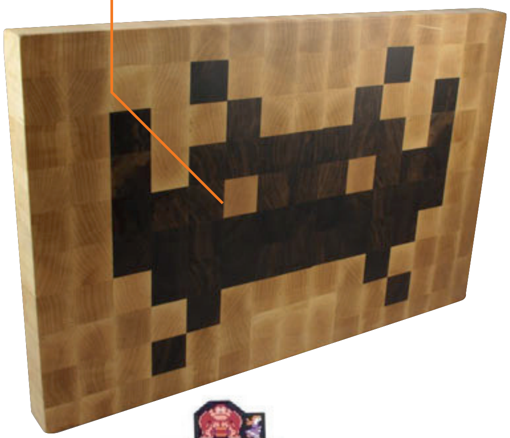
- **Price:** £29.99
- **Manufacturer:** Udon Entertainment
- **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk

Udon has been putting some fantastic books together for Capcom recently and this effort is no different. This 144-page publication is filled with imagery from the *Mega Man X* series, including rare art, box designs, concept work and much, much more. The lack of original *Mega Man* art is disappointing, but fans will still find this essential.

Space Invaders Cutting Board

- **RRP:** $129.99 (approx £78)
- **Manufacturer:** ThinkGeek
- **Buy it from:** www.thinkgeek.com

Seriously, what is it about *Space Invaders* and homeware? A few issues back we covered *Space Invaders* wall tattoos, last month it was dinner trays and ice cube makers, and this month we have an extremely pricey cutting board. These are individually hand made, though.







Street Fighter 3D Poster

- **Price:** £12.99
- **Manufacturer:** Capcom
- **Buy it from:** www.play.com

3D posters are all the rage at the moment, so it was only a matter of time before videogame companies started getting in on the act. This stylish poster features all the characters from *Street Fighter II* and creates a nice impression of depth when hanging on your wall. Now where's the *Street Fighter III* one?

Donkey Kong Jenga

- **RRP:** £19.99
- **Manufacturer:** Usaopoly
- **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk

It's Jenga, but with a cool *Donkey Kong* spin. Compete against other Marios in order to rescue Pauline, but careful. One wrong move and the whole tower of foam girders will come crashing down upon you.

Tetris TV Game

- **RRP:** £9.99
- **Manufacturer:** Radica
- **Buy it from:** www.play.com

This is worth picking up for the funky-looking *Tetris*-themed controllers alone. This quirky plug-in-and-play TV game comes packed with five variants of the puzzle classic and two pads so you can go head-to-head with your friends.



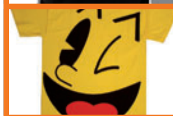
TOP FIVE T-SHIRTS



01 Gauntlet
- **RRP:** £14.95
- **Manufacturer:** Retro GT
- **Buy it from:** www.retrogt.com



02 Amstrad
- **RRP:** £14.95
- **Manufacturer:** Retro GT
- **Buy it from:** www.retrogt.com



03 Pac-Man
- **RRP:** £11.95
- **Manufacturer:** Namco
- **Buy it from:** www.play.com



04 Street Fighter II
- **RRP:** £11.99
- **Manufacturer:** Bravado
- **Buy it from:** www.play.com



05 Sonic The Hedgehog
- **RRP:** £11.99
- **Manufacturer:** Unknown
- **Buy it from:** www.play.com

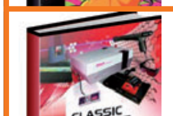
TOP FIVE BOOKS



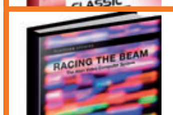
01 Rogue Leaders: The Story Of LucasArts
- **RRP:** £34.99 ■ **Publisher:** Titan Books
- **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk



02 Porn & Pong
- **RRP:** £10.99
- **Publisher:** Feral House
- **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk



03 Classic Home Video Games 1985-1988
- **RRP:** £8.99 ■ **Publisher:** Random House
- **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk



04 Racing The Beam
- **RRP:** £14.95
- **Publisher:** MIT Press
- **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk



05 Game Over
- **RRP:** £22.14
- **Publisher:** Cyberactive Media Group
- **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk

TOP FIVE MISCELLANEOUS



01 Panzer Dragoon Music Box
- **RRP:** £29.99
- **Manufacturer:** Unknown
- **Buy it from:** www.videogameimports.com



02 Pac-Man Hotplate Holder
- **RRP:** $14.99 (£9.23 approx)
- **Manufacturer:** Unknown
- **Buy it from:** www.thinkgeek.com



03 Tetris TV Game
- **RRP:** £9.99
- **Manufacturer:** Radica
- **Buy it from:** www.play.com



04 Sonic Costume
- **RRP:** £34.94
- **Manufacturer:** Heroes For Kids
- **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk



05 Space Invaders Clock
- **RRP:** $80
- **Manufacturer:** Taito
- **Buy it from:** www.japantrendshop.com

* A MOMENT WITH...

Philip Oliver

This month we met Philip Oliver, co-creator of Dizzy and Super Robin Hood, and co-founder of Blitz Games Studios



Who is Philip Oliver?

Along with his brother, Andrew, he formed one of the most successful gaming partnerships ever. The Oliver Twins are most famous for *Dizzy*, but they worked with Codemasters on a range of titles before creating their own company, Interactive Studios, aged just 22 in 1991.

Which of your games would you recommend to our readers and why?
Dizzy. But there have been many great games over the years – and as I've been in the industry now for 25 years, there are just too many great games to choose from. I often quote early classics because of their elegance.

What is your proudest memory?
Last year Andrew and I both received honorary doctorates from Coventry University – he is now a doctor of technology and I'm a doctor of business administration, so we're certified geeks now! I'm immensely proud and honoured to have been awarded this. Our parents and families were able to attend the ceremony in Coventry Cathedral, which was fantastic.

What's the most difficult thing you've encountered while working on a game?
I used to write code – 6502 and Z80 8-bit assembler. Programmers are so lucky to have C and C++ these days. Trust me, when your basic instruction is to add two numbers together and not overflow 255, it's pretty hard to do the simplest of tasks! But as the industry changed over to C and then C++, I gave up programming to focus on the business side, which has challenges too.

Who in the industry do you most admire?
Archer Maclean. Great guy – very clever and very creative. Very British!

Which game do you wish you'd made?
Pac-Man. It's such a simple and elegant game and, boy, was it addictive. Back in 1980 Andrew and I were hooked, so it was an honour in 2004 when Namco approached us to make *Pac-Man World 3*.

What opportunities has making videogames given you?
Not having to do a real job. That's the joke many people make when talking about the industry. The real truth is that everyone works very hard, in very skilled areas. But if you love what you do it's worth the hard work and long hours.

What's your best memory?
Games have overtaken films in terms of revenue and have broken most entertainment records. We are taken seriously and I've even been invited to breakfast with Alistair Darling to tell him about the industry and suggest ways in which the government can support such a creative and exciting industry.

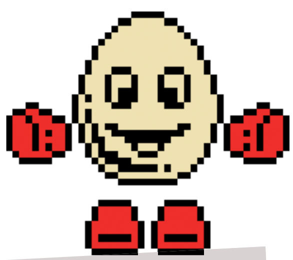


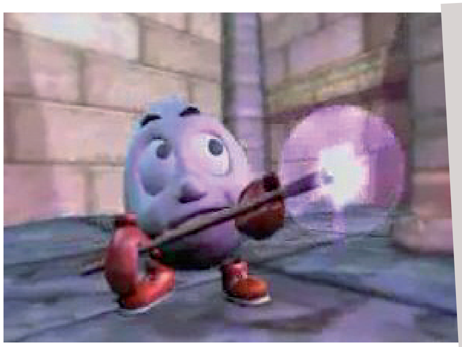
» [Amiga] *Dizzy: Prince Of The Yolkfolk* is one of an impressive 14 games starring the loveable egg.

Can you share one interesting anecdote about your time in the industry?
Embarrassing ones are always the best. A colleague and I were staying in a posh hotel in LA while out on business. He was bored and asked to come down and watch TV and order room service, which turned up on the traditional huge trolley with a large silver dome. After he finished eating, he realised the trolley was too large to get round the bed, so he asked me to help him manoeuvre it. Somehow I ended up outside in the corridor in my boxer shorts, and the door slammed shut, leaving us in the corridor, with me in my boxer shorts! I had to wait for the porter to come up and let us in, so I spent ten minutes trying not to make eye contact with all the well-dressed clients in the hotel.

How has the industry changed?
Back in the early Eighties it felt like a few individuals dotted around the country who barely knew of each others' existence. We all saw it as a hobby that might earn some pocket money. When I look at *Dead To Rights: Retribution*, our upcoming title, I'm stunned at just what is possible on modern consoles. *

> "It was such an honour when Namco approached us to make Pac-Man World 3"



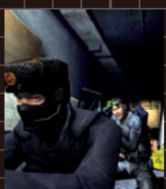




8 January–4 February

retrodiary

» A month of retro events both past and present



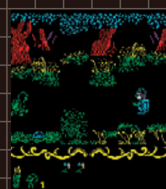
9 January 2004

■ The Apple Macintosh finally gets to see *Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell*, almost two years after the original Xbox release.



10 January 1985

■ Sir Clive's biggest misjudgement was officially launched. The Sinclair C5 hit the streets… and the kerb… and a lorry…



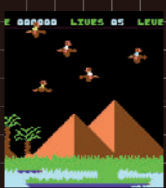
10 January 1986

■ *Robin Of The Wood*, a *Sabre Wulf*-style game, is released by Odin on the Spectrum and C64.



10 January 1994

■ *Dr Robotnik's Mean Bean Machine* is released on Sega's handheld Game Gear console.



13 January 1986

■ *Imhotep*, the C64 game published by the usually ultra reliable Ultimate, was unleashed. It was too hard and bombed spectacularly.



13 January 1984

■ Friday the 13th wasn't unlucky for Newsfield Publications as the first issue of *Crash* is published.



12 January 1984

■ The Sinclair QL is released. Although primarily a business machine, a small range of games was made available.



10 January 1999

■ *Star Wars: Rogue Squadron* hits the Nintendo 64 around Europe to a thumbs-up from gamers and good magazine reviews.



14 January 2004

■ The first of only two N-Gage releases of *FIFA Soccer* was released. All seven of the N-Gage's UK users were happy.



15 January 1987

■ The first issue of *LM*, the ill-fated lifestyle magazine from the publisher of *Crash* and *Zzap*, hits the streets.



15 January 1988

■ British NES owners were suffering windy-pops with news that *Metroid* had been released – almost 18 months after Japan.



15 January 1990

■ Lucasfilm releases *Loom* on the PC, an adventure involving Bobbin Threadbare, swans and the Guild of Weavers.



29 January 1998

■ The first game in the *Harvest Moon* series, the farming role-playing game, is released on the SNES in Europe.



26 January 2007

■ *Starfox Command*, the first game in Nintendo's *Starfox* series to appear on the Nintendo DS, is released in the UK.



26 January 1995

■ Eat dirt, nefarious evildoer! *Earthworm Jim* makes his groovy super-suited debut in the UK on the SNES and Mega Drive.



21 January 1993

■ *Super Mario Kart* for the SNES is released in the UK. Almost simultaneously millions of hours of free time are mysteriously lost.



31 January 1999

■ The US is the first place to see a new survival horror franchise born. Welcome to *Silent Hill*!



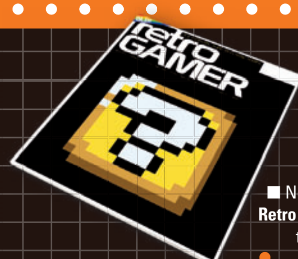
31 January 2001

■ Sega officially leaves the console market to concentrate on games and become a major third-party software publisher.



3 February 1986

■ *Sweevo's World*, an isometric arcade adventure heavy on humour, is released on the Spectrum by Gargoyle Games.



04 Feb 2010

■ New issue of **Retro Gamer** hits the streets.

VISIT **RETROGAMER.NET/FORUM** TO HAVE YOUR SAY

BACK TO THE EIGHTIES

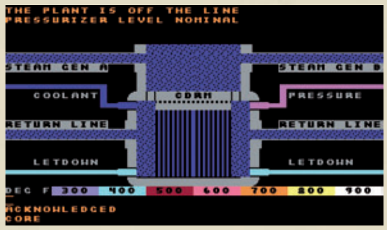
THE LATEST NEWS FROM JANUARY 1988



JANUARY 1988 – Virgin territory for Mastertronic, OutRun goes 3D, Elite goes 16-bit, US Gold goes nuclear, Software Projects has a snake in the grass while the French Get Dexter again. Richard Burton scoffs fromage and slurps vin for the cause…



» [Atari ST] No longer the sole domain of CPC owners, Dexter and co were winning over ST gamers too.



» [C64] A strategy simulation of a nuclear reactor edging towards meltdown. Sounds nail-bitingly exciting. It wasn't.



» [C64] The sequel to *Trailblazer* was infuriatingly fast, requiring lightning-fast reflexes and patience in abundance.

The Mastertronic empire had been steadily growing over recent months, and its partnership with Sega and its Master System was proving very lucrative. Mastertronic reported strong sales over Christmas, with over 30,000 units sold.

It went on to reveal plans for intended releases for the coming year as well as news of two interesting add-ons for the Master System. Coming soon would be 3D glasses and a Light Phaser priced at £39.95 and £44.95 respectively, with new games released to make use of these new toys.

Among the most eagerly awaited of the 3D games were *Zaxxon 3D* and *OutRun 3D*. The standard *OutRun* had sold extremely well, so any enhancement on that game should firmly grab the imagination of gamers and wallets of parents in equal measure. Conventional new releases promised included *Alien Syndrome* and *After Burner*.

Mastertronic also found time to give aged classics a new lease of life on its Ricochet label, with *The Way Of The Exploding Fist* getting the budget treatment. Now you can enjoy a punch to the face without the hindrance of a broken nose or blood loss for less than £2.

With Mastertronic having fingers in several pies and doing well with all those pastry-based products, it came as a surprise to find that Richard Branson's Virgin Group had decided to buy a 45 per cent stake in Mastertronic. Expect a full takeover soon…



» 3D gaming comes to the Master System with big old Elvis-style sunglasses. Thank you very much…

Elite Systems finally succumbed to the pressure of 16-bit machines and announced that it would be entering the 16-bit gaming market within three months, with the earliest releases being the arcade classics *Paperboy*, *Space Harrier* and *Buggy Boy*.

Telecomsoft, owner of the Firebird and Rainbird labels, added further developers to its burgeoning roster of employees. Having recently acquired Mike Singleton and his Maelstrom Games, BT also signed up the talented Swedish programmer Bo Jangeborg, the man behind the 8-bit isometric *Fairlight*.

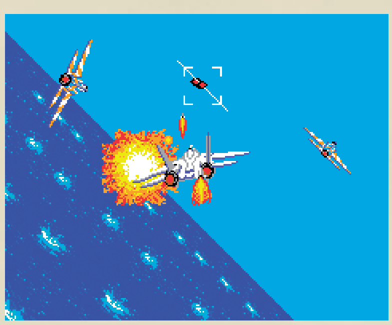
The results were mixed. While Maelstrom went on to bring us two *Midwinter* games, the Jangeborg deal was cancelled with nothing to show. A side-scrolling shoot-'em-up for the Spectrum was under development, but Jangeborg felt it wasn't going to be of good enough quality for release, so the project was cancelled.

Cinemaware was offering the rights to distribute its next wave of releases in Europe and, once again, Mirrorsoft, which previously distributed for Cinemaware, won out. The new deal saw Mirrorsoft release two titles: *The Three Stooges*, based on the comedy trio, and the B-movie styled *Rocket Ranger*. Early indications looked good…

US Gold was heading into controversy with the release of a new simulation, *The Chernobyl Syndrome*. For those who fancied controlling a nuclear power plant, this was ideal, but with the Chernobyl disaster having occurred just 20 months previously, it was felt to be taking advantage, with thousands still suffering its effects.

Maybe the media wanted to temporarily take the moral high ground for a moment and query the choice of subject matter, as it did with US Gold's *Raid Over Moscow* and PSS's *Theatre Europe*. US Gold insisted that it wasn't offensive, and it was right: it wasn't. The £9.99 price tag that C64 gamers would have to spend on this tediously dull simulation was, though.

Epyx was set to unleash a sequel to its C64 classic game, *Impossible Mission 2*, this



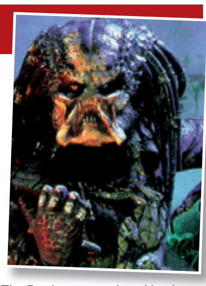
» [Master System] No hydraulic cabinet to throw you around but still very playable considering the Master System's limitations.



» [Amiga] Curly, Larry and Moe create mayhem in a surprisingly entertaining effort. N'yuk, n'yuk, n'yuk.

1988

JANUARY NEWS



» The Predator was played by the 7'2" tall Kevin Peter Hall. He sadly died aged 35 years.

4 January and it was reported that the BBC was receiving several thousand complaints from parents and schools that their children/students were playing truant to watch the goings on in the suburb of Erinsborough.

Until then, Aussie soap opera *Neighbours* only aired on BBC One in the late lunchtime slot, but with complaints growing the BBC decided to repeat the episode at 5:35pm to satisfy all concerned. It was a masterstroke, intentional or otherwise, with the later slot attracting regular audiences up to 18 million viewers at its peak.

Staying in Australia, 26 January marked the bicentenary of the foundation of the first European colony on Australian land. The First Fleet, a flotilla of 11 ships carrying prisoners from the United Kingdom, landed at Port Jackson. A penal colony was set up there, which eventually became Sydney. The date became a national holiday and is known as Australia Day.



» Mrs Mangel: scarier than being chased by Pyramid Head.

What better way to bring in the new year than with a UK movie premiere. Arnold Schwarzenegger et al are attempting to rescue American airmen captured by guerrillas in a jungle somewhere in Central America. Unfortunately, this team of crack commandoes is being hunted… by the Predator.

The movie proved to be a marvellous sci-fi action romp, with Arnie eventually taking on the alien hunter single-handedly.



» [C64] No, not the film with Tom Cruise in – the sequel to a C64 classic… and it's good.

time set in an expansive office complex. You must locate five PINs to allow you to move around each of the five sections, avoid those troublesome robots, solve the puzzles and find and defeat the evil Elvin Atombender.

Impossible Mission 2 proved to be a very worthy sequel to the highly rated original, although the 8-bit versions fared better than the ST and Amiga efforts.

Software Projects gave a progress update on its next big Spectrum game, *Anaconda*. It looked superb, being an ambitious combination of *Ikari Warriors*, *Valtric* and *Salamander* while offering two options for the simultaneous two-player modes: co-operation or conflict.



» [Spectrum] Just £1.99 got you a right royal kicking.

The game was completed, but a legal dispute between Software Projects director Tommy Barton and the developer Reptile Industries was never resolved. It killed off any chance of the game being released and also put paid to Reptile Industries. Ironically, a few short months later, Software Projects ceased trading too. Had it released *Anaconda*, things may have been so very different.

Often cited as one of the best games on the Amstrad, connoisseurs of fine French gaming were preparing to suffer windy trousers with the news that a *Get Dexter* sequel would be released by March. Atari ST owners would also get a look at the colourful isometric arcade adventure that had taken the CPC world by storm. C'est magnifique.

Computer & Video Games was once again doling out Hit awards with *Rampage* (C64, Activision), *Blockbusters* (TV Games, C64), *Driller* (Incentive, Amstrad), *Slaine* (Martech, Spectrum), *Zarch* (Superior Software, Archimedes), *Bobsleigh* (Digital Integration, Spectrum), *Xor* (Hewson, Atari ST), *Ranarama* (Hewson, Atari ST) and *Trivial Pursuit* (Domark, Atari ST) being winners.

However, the big guns for the new year were *Bangkok Knights* (System 3, C64) and *Octapolis* (English Software, C64), both attaining Game of the Month status.

C64 owners also had a fine platter of Christmas leftovers to choose from with the Sizzled efforts of *Combat School* (Ocean), *Driller* (Incentive), *Tetris* (Mirrorsoft), *Chuck Yeager's Advanced Flight Trainer* (Electronic Arts), *Battles In Normandy* (SSG), *Cosmic Causeway* (Gremlin Graphics), *Skate Or Die* (Electronic Arts) and *Risk* (The Edge), with *Spore* (Bulldog) getting a rare silver medal for budget gaming excellence.

THIS MONTH IN…

YOUR SINCLAIR



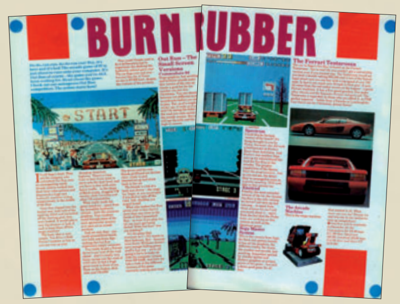
A preview of the forthcoming *Masters Of The Universe* game by Gremlin Graphics featured predominantly, in lieu of the recent *He-Man* cinema release featuring Dolph "I must break you" Lundgren in the title role. Was the game any good? About as good as the film was… so no, not brilliant.



COMPUTER AND VIDEO GAMES



It was *OutRun* month in *C&VG*, complete with a cracking front cover and *OutRun* soundtrack tape. The preview feature noted that each version had its foibles: Spectrum – graphics; Master System – flickery sprites; C64 – poor car handling; and Amstrad – everything.



ZZAP!



Want to know who created the inlay artwork on your favourite games? The *Zzap!* article on four of these very artists – Bob Wakelin, Tony Roberts, Steinar Lund and David Rowe – would make for essential reading. It's a pity it wasn't extended to magazine covers to highlight Oliver Frey and Jerry Paris too.



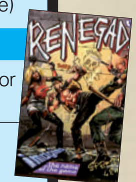
CHARTS

JANUARY 1988



AMSTRAD

1. Grand Prix Simulator (Codemasters)
2. Pro Ski Simulator (Codemasters)
3. Dizzy (Codemasters)
4. Joe Blade (Players)
5. Renegade (Imagine)



SPECTRUM

1. Grand Prix Simulator (Codemasters)
2. Fruit Machine Simulator (Codemasters)
3. Renegade (Imagine)
4. ATV Simulator (Codemasters)
5. Indiana Jones And The Temple Of Doom (US Gold)



AMIGA

1. Barbarian (Psygnosis)
2. Feud (Mastertronic)
3. Defender Of The Crown (Mirrorsoft)
4. The Hunt For Red October (Argus)
5. Test Drive (Electronic Arts)

MUSIC

1. Heaven Is A Place On Earth (Belinda Carlisle)
2. Always On My Mind (Pet Shop Boys)
3. House Arrest (Krush)
4. Stutter Rap (No Sleep 'Til Bedtime) (Morris Minor and the Majors)
5. Angel Eyes (Home And Away) (Wet Wet Wet)

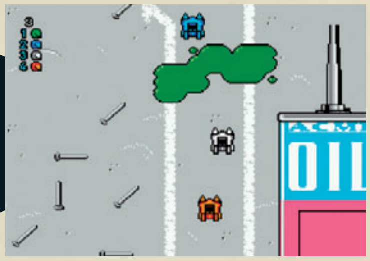


BACK TO THE NINETIES

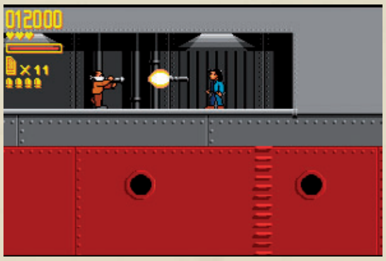


THE LATEST NEWS FROM JULY 1992

JULY 1992 – EA goes on Strike, Palace goes Supersized, Ocean has a Lethal Weapon, go for US Gold in Summer Games, frogs and toads go head to head, with a hedgehog trumping them both. Richard Burton puts Chaos Emeralds over Gold Medals…



» [NES] Who would have thought racing in miniature vehicles around a kitchen table and bath tub could be so much fun?



» [Atari ST] Ocean took an okay movie and created a first-rate platform game. It usually did the opposite.



» [Amiga] More chopper action than you can shake a non-functioning British Army rifle at.

Electronic Arts had sequel news revealing that it was preparing to convert its most successful Mega Drive release to the Amiga. *Desert Strike: Return To The Gulf* was an isometric-styled gunship simulation with plenty of shoot-'em-up action mixed with strategy. EA hoped it would be ready in time for Christmas – it wasn't – and hoped it was as good as the superb Mega Drive version, which it was.

Palace Software was attempting to revitalise some of its older titles for the Atari ST and Amiga markets, with updates of former 8-bit hits *Barbarian* and *Cauldron*. Palace began development of *Super Barbarian* in-house, while *Super Cauldron* was farmed out to Titus.

Regrettably, the *Super Barbarian* project didn't progress very far and was shelved. Titus completed and belatedly released its *Cauldron* game in 1993. It was a cutesy scrolling platform game of which there were many, and it didn't offer anything original, unlike its earlier iterations, which had a spot of innovation and style about them. *Super Cauldron* unfortunately just melted into the background noise of 16-bit mediocrity.

Presumably with one eye on this month's summer Olympiad and the other on its bottom line, US Gold felt the need to release its former golden oldie hits of *Summer Games I* and *II* on the Atari ST and Amiga.

Although both offered no improvement over the original releases and were graphically disappointing, the gameplay was still there, and they were both enjoyable to play at face value. US Gold released the pair, alongside another former hit *California Games*, in a compilation called *Mega Sports*. It nicely paved the way for US Gold to release an all-new *California Games II*, featuring five new events, but it wasn't on a par with the original and bombed.

Frogs and toads were set to go head to head with news from Mindscape and Team17. In the pipeline were more scrolling platform games with a distinctly amphibian flavour. Mindscape had obtained the rights to convert Rare's excellent NES game *Battletoads*, while Team17 was developing *Superfrog* for the Amiga.

So, then: frog or toad, toad or frog? Taking into consideration that *Battletoads* eventually appeared late in 1994 with *Superfrog* mid-1993, you could be forgiven for being under the illusion that something quite special was being created, given the development time both enjoyed.

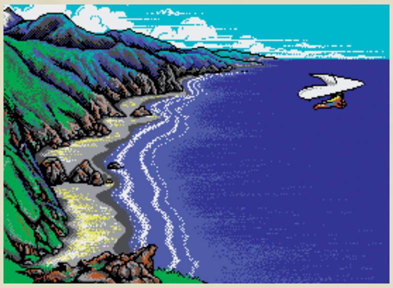
Battletoads was special, but for all the wrong reasons. It was awful in just about every conceivable way. *Superfrog* was at the other end of the spectrum: a good-looking and pleasing game that had depth, nice graphics and a hidden level. So frog beats toad, but can frog beat Mel Gibson?

It seems there's not a month goes by without Ocean Software acquiring some film or television licensed product to produce a game. July was no different. *Lethal Weapon 3*, the Mel Gibson and Danny Glover buddy cop action movie, was next in line for the Ocean treatment, and the scrolling platform shooter would follow Ocean's well-trodden formula. Remember *Hudson Hawk* and *Darkman*?

Lethal Weapon turned out to be a surprisingly good game. It certainly wasn't breaking new ground or offering anything pioneering in the name of platform games, but it was what it was: jumping,



» *N-Force* was new and just for Nintendo console owners. Thankfully, no one ever tried to publish *GX4000-Force*.



» [Amiga] 'Sports' you could play in this lacklustre sequel included hang-gliding, carpet stroking and bean flicking.





» [Amiga] Not hugely original but still a very entertaining and playable platform game from Team17.

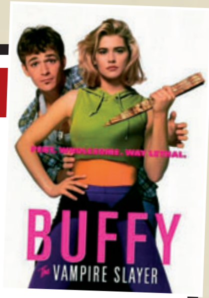
THIS MONTH IN… CHARTS

1992

JULY NEWS

25 July marked the opening ceremony of the 25th Olympiad in Barcelona, Spain. It was one of the most successful Olympics ever, helped by a record participation from 169 nations. South Africa was back after 32 years, the Soviet Union became 12 republics, Germany was unified, and North Korea and Cuba returned.

With a rousing opening ceremony including Montserrat Caballe singing the late Freddie Mercury's *Barcelona* anthem and the UK's Linford Christie going on to win the 100m gold, Barcelona '92 proved to be a spectacular success.



» Before Sarah Michelle Gellar there was Kristy Swanson.

Five years before Sarah Michelle Gellar inherited the guise of Buffy, there was Kristy Swanson, kicking the faces off demons between cheerleading routines. The world premiere on 31 July set the wheels in motion for Joss Whedon to take *Buffy* in a slightly darker direction.

24 July saw more movie cheese in the form of *Universal Soldier.* Two US soldiers in Vietnam end up killing each other, are promptly frozen, 'fixed', and later sent on their way with freshly wiped memories. Oh, they're also super soldiers who fight terrorism.



» Within days of *Universal Soldier,* sales of ear necklaces soared.





» [Amiga] It's *Cauldron* but it's not super. Not a patch on the original 8-bit games.



» [SNES] The arcade game everyone was playing arrived on the SNES… and everyone was playing that too…

shooting and mindless violence. It was all done very tidily and resulted in one of Ocean's better film tie-ins.

Everyone knew that *Sonic The Hedgehog* was due for a sequel, but no one was sure when, and rumours were rife that it was already under way. Sega finally revealed that *Sonic 2* would be released in the US and Europe on 24 November, with Japan getting it three days earlier – the first time that a Mega Drive game had an almost simultaneous worldwide release.

The Master System and Game Gear versions would be released in October and November and introduce a new playable character: Miles 'Tails' Prower. Sonic and Tails would have to combine to once again battle Dr Robotnik and stop him and his evil Death Egg. It goes without saying that the game sold exceedingly well indeed…

There was a new magazine nestling in among the old guard on newsagents' shelves. From Europress Impact and produced and written by several Newsfield old boys came the Nintendo-specific *N-Force.* Oozing with Oliver Frey sketches from almost every page, it was very similar to its sister magazine *Sega Force* in content and style.

The reviewers picked a good month to start their summations of the new crop of titles. Which games would gain their newly forged award, the Knockout? They spread their love over *The Fantastic Adventures Of Dizzy* (NES, Codemasters), *Tiny Toons Adventure: Babs' Big Break* (Konami, Game Boy), *Super Smash TV* (Acclaim, SNES), *WWF Super WrestleMania* (Acclaim, SNES), *The Legend Of The Mystical Ninja* (Konami, SNES), *Contra Spirits* (Konami, SNES) and *Lemmings* (Sunsoft, SNES).

Sega Force countered the wave of Nintendo goodness with its own *Sega Force* Smash selection: *Prince Of Persia* (Domark, Master System), *Taz-Mania* (Sega, Mega Drive), *Corporation* (Virgin, Mega Drive) and *Chuck Rock* (Virgin, Mega Drive).

Meanwhile, *Mean Machines* was blessed with some top games this month, duly bestowing Mega Game status onto *Dragon's Fury* (Technosoft, Mega Drive), *Top Gear* (Kemco, SNES), *Micro Machines* (Codemasters, NES), *Prince Of Persia* (Domark, Master System) and *Super Aleste* (Toho, SNES).

One game did stand head and shoulders above all else, though: *Street Fighter II* (Capcom, SNES), with a near-perfect 98%.

THE ONE AMIGA



There was a sneak preview of the A570. No, not another Amiga but a CD-ROM drive; a handy add-on and compatible with Amiga CDTV software releases, but not compatible with Workbench 1.2 and not even slightly compatible with the Amiga A600. Bargain for £299, then.



COMMODORE FORMAT



Gary Penn dug deep to find out what had happened to past C64 luminaries. *Mercenary* creator Paul Woakes had apparently opened a kebab shop in Oldham in between programming jobs, and Paul Shirley was running a pub in Leicester.



MEAN MACHINES



Games too hard? You'll be wanting a Game Genie, then. The game-altering gadget was coming to Britain. By entering a series of letters in on-screen code slots you could get infinite lives and extra power-ups. £45 would buy you the console equivalent of entering pokes.

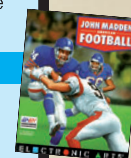


JULY 1992



PC

1 Dune (Virgin)
2 F16 Falcon 3.0 (Spectrum Holobyte/ MicroProse)
3 Star Trek (Interplay/ Electronic Arts)
4 Lemmings (Psygnosis)
5 Monkey Island 2: LeChuck's Revenge (Lucasfilm)



AMIGA

1 John Madden American Football (Electronic Arts)
2 Beholder 2 (SSI/US Gold)
3 John Barnes Football (Krisalis)
4 Project-X (Team17)
5 Formula One Grand Prix (MicroProse)

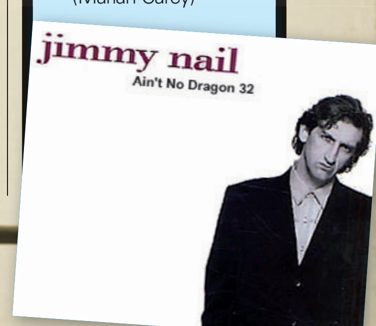


MASTER SYSTEM

1 Sonic The Hedgehog (Sega)
2 Asterix (Sega)
3 Land Of Illusion Starring Mickey Mouse (Sega)
4 The Lucky Dime Caper Starring Donald Duck (Sega)
5 Super Kick Off (US Gold)

MUSIC

1 Ain't No Doubt (Jimmy Nail)
2 Rhythm Is A Dancer (Snap!)
3 Sesame's Treet (Smart E's)
4 Abba-Esque (EP) (Erasure)
5 I'll Be There (Mariah Carey)



20

retro GAMER.net READER'S REVIVAL

FAXANADU

DWARVES COME AS STANDARD



- » **PUBLISHER:** HUDSON
- » **RELEASED:** 1987
- » **GENRE:** ADVENTURE
- » **FEATURED HARDWARE:** NES
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** A FEW QUID



HISTORY

I first played and finished this game as a rental while staying with my grandparents in New South Wales in 1992. For months after that I lusted to own my own copy. When I'd finally scrimped enough money, I rocked up to Mr Toys... and got seduced by the *Shadowgate* box art instead. As much as I ended up enjoying Kemco's minor classic, *Faxanadu* is by far the better game. Developed by Falcom in 1987, it's a flick-screen platformer with RPG overtones, reminiscent of such luminaries as *Zeliard*, *Wonder Boy In Monster World* and *Metroid*. I think it's as good as any of those, and I'll tell you why!

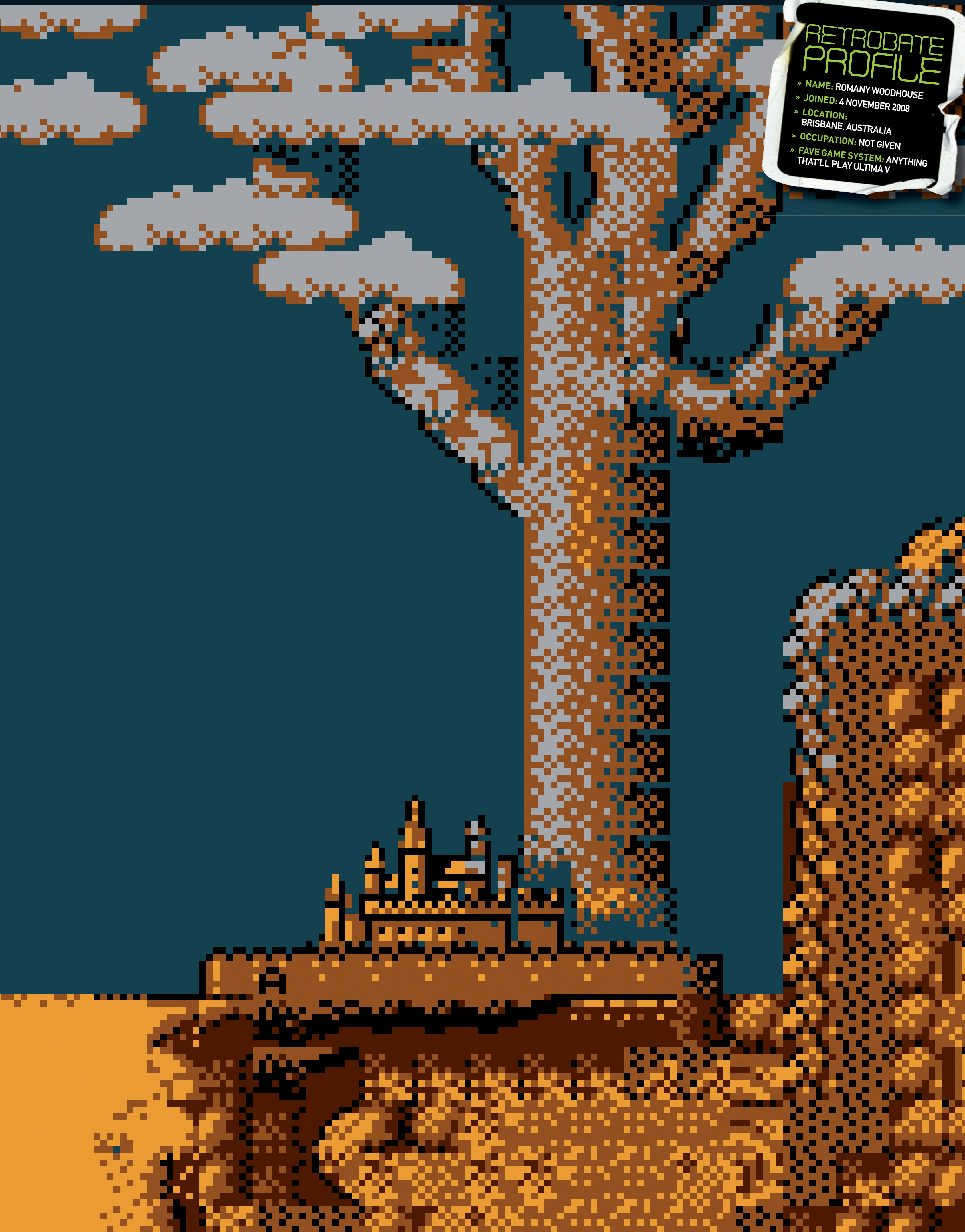
First off, though, you need to look past a few minor quirks. There's the hackneyed story – your nameless elf returns home, finds it dying of thirst, and sets off to unblock the wells and vanquish THE EVIL ONE. There's the insistence on calling all of your enemies dwarves, including spiky ball things, giant bats and the even more giant dragon. The animation is also decidedly staccato, and the jump physics feel disconcertingly heavy.

The atmosphere, though, is first-class. You spend the entire game ascending a gigantic tree, complete with safe villages and shops, unsafe villages, and sprawling fortresses. You'll travel through several distinct zones, culminating in the massive stronghold of the King of the Dwarves – again, not a dwarf – and the lair of the Evil One. Along the way you'll gain experience, upgrade your gear, and gasp at the cost of magic spells. The misty zone after you unblock the wells, complete with spooky music, is particularly well done. The graphics are small but colourful and detailed, and the platform design puts most, if not all, similar games to shame. Combat is simple but satisfying, and you'll even soar through the clouds.

Interestingly, this game bucks fantasy tradition with its arboreal dwarves and terrestrial elves. If that offends, I don't know what to say. Otherwise, play this game.

Want to appear in the magazine? Be sure to upload your classic profiles at www.retrogamer.net





RETROBATE PROFILE

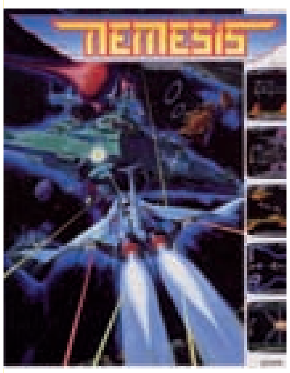
» **NAME:** ROMANY WOODHOUSE
» **JOINED:** 4 NOVEMBER 2008
» **LOCATION:** BRISBANE, AUSTRALIA
» **OCCUPATION:** NOT GIVEN
» **FAVE GAME SYSTEM:** ANYTHING THAT'LL PLAY ULTIMA V





IN THE KNOW

- » **Name:** Nemesis
- » **Released:** 1985
- » **Publisher:** Konami
- » **Developer:** In-house
- » **Price:** £200-250
- » **By The Same Developer:** Contra



COIN-OP CAPERS

#4 Nemesis

We take a definitive look back at a classic arcade game and unravel its brilliance with the help of those who know it best

The coin-op game *Nemesis* – or *Gradius,* as it was originally named in Japan – is the first title in a long and convoluted line of horizontal shoot-'em-ups from Konami. There are so many different entries in the series, across such a wide variety of formats, that RG deservedly gave it the 'Definitive' treatment way back in issue 24. If you have that issue to hand, it would be a good idea to go and familiarise yourself with it, if only to be amazed at the crazy sprawl of sequels and updates that *Nemesis* has generated – and the piece doesn't begin to cover the spin-offs like *Salamander*, *Parodius* and, at a pinch, *Thunder Cross*.

Stuart Campbell's article is also recommended because it raises a very interesting point: the original game really wasn't as influential or important as many people would have you believe. Yes, its power-up system, where you banked space currency and spent it on upgraded weapons, was certainly unique, yet it didn't become a common feature in similar games. And while *Nemesis* is probably the first thing that springs to mind when you think about horizontal shooters, the real granddaddy of the genre is actually Konami's 1981 arcade hit *Scramble*. So what is the fascination with *Nemesis*? Why exactly is **RG** devoting another eight pages to it? Well, if you've played the coin-op, you already know why. *Nemesis* is just a really great game. That's all.

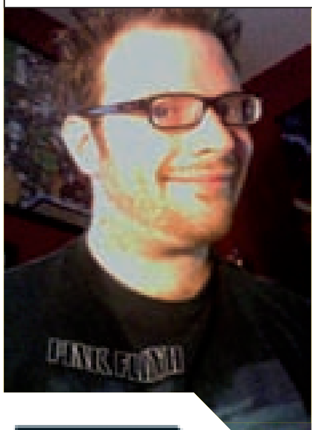
It doesn't take long for this realisation to occur – before the end of the first stage, in fact. Having activated enough power-ups to transform your sluggish pea-shooter of a ship into a speedy, laser-spitting weapon of doom, you're able to shoot down space meanies for fun. But then your ship comes to a dead stop above a couple of angry-looking volcanoes and suddenly you're being showered with flaming rocks. The movement patterns you've relied on so far fly straight out the window as you evasively snap your ship in random directions. And if you do survive this frantic set piece, the end-of-level boss ship rumbles into view. A deadly game of cat and mouse ensues as you chip away at its frontal defences while avoiding its missile fire. Finally, you manage to pop the core with a well-placed shot and the boss blows. It's a beautiful moment, but any joy is short-lived as you sail straight into the next stage where even more determined enemies await.

Nemesis is certainly not an easy game, but at the same time it plays fair. You're not required to memorise enemy attack patterns to survive; quick reflexes alone are generally enough to see you through most stages. Throw in a little strategy based around optimal power-up selections and you've got one finely balanced, fun-to-play shooter. That the game has attracted such a hardcore fan base and spawned so many sequels and spin-offs over the past 25 years – right up to the recent *Gradius ReBirth* for the Nintendo Wii – is hardly surprising.

A notable element of the game's legacy is the many home versions that appeared following its arcade debut. The most popular were probably the versions for the MSX and NES – both developed by Konami itself and released in 1986 – as it's difficult to imagine devotees of either platform not having owned or at least played the game at some point. The following year, *Nemesis* was released for the Commodore 64, Amstrad CPC and Sinclair Spectrum, with decidedly mixed results. Close to arcade-perfect ports later graced the PC-Engine, PlayStation and Saturn, and more recently the game blasted onto the PSP as part of the *Gradius Collection*. This 2006 handheld compilation celebrated the core series in style and served to remind us how well the original coin-op has held up over the years. And that's the sign of a truly great game. *



the expert



PROFILE

- **Name:** Joe Martin
- **Age:** 28
- **Date of birth:** 17 September 1981
- **Hometown:** Sebring, Florida, USA
- **Current World Records:** *Vs Gradius* [MAME] 410,900 points; *Gradius III* [MAME] 99,740 points; *Last Resort* [MAME] 183,900

Joe Martin is on a mission. He's currently the Nemesis high score record holder on MAME, and now he's set his sights on toppling the coin-op record, which has stood since 1985

■ How did your relationship with *Nemesis* begin?
The fascination with *Nemesis* actually began with *Vs Gradius*, the coin-op version that was exported to the US. I remember first playing it when I was seven, in our local Chuck E Cheese pizza parlour, because someone had inserted too many credits and not bothered to hit start. I began playing *Nemesis* much later, around 2007. I was shocked to see that *Nemesis* itself is far more difficult than *Vs Gradius*. I found myself getting to the volcano eruption section at the end of the first stage and repeatedly dying due to not learning a pattern. However, I was impressed by the DIY power-up system and the fast-paced action of the game.

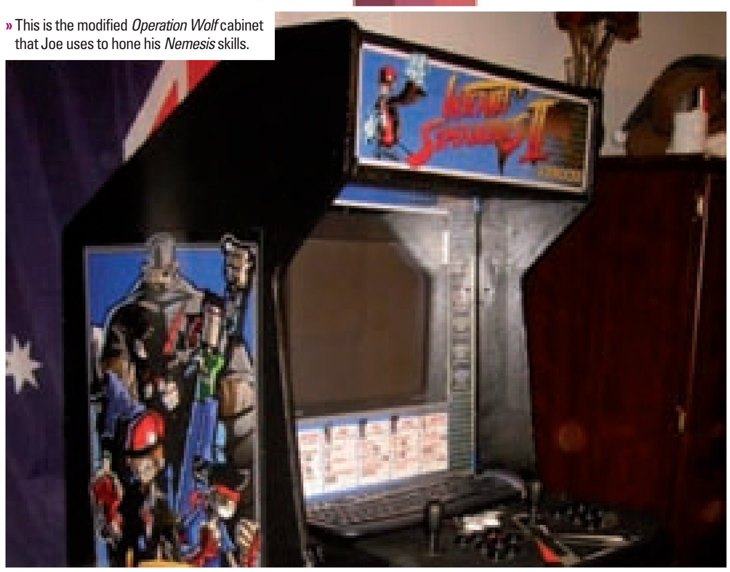
■ What prompted you to go for the high score?
I had discovered Twin Galaxies after watching the 2007 documentary *The King Of Kong* and was fascinated with the idea of applying my scores against those set by others. I had missed out on the golden age of competitive arcade gaming in the Eighties, so this was a kind of equivalent. *Nemesis* was the first game that came to mind, and it's the one I've devoted most of my time towards.



■ What control method do you use?
I use an X-Arcade stick that's rigged to the converted hulk of an old *Operation Wolf* cabinet that's had the gun emplacement torn out. My computer sits inside and is dedicated entirely to MAME. I can play *Nemesis* on the keyboard, but a great deal of precision is lost in comparison to an authentic arcade stick. Being able to operate a directional joystick with the left hand using simple reflexive wrist responses, while operating the buttons with my right hand just feels more natural than mashing buttons on a keyboard.



■ Can you describe the events that led up to you achieving your first world record score of 714,400 points on 11 March 2009?
That game in particular is the very definition of a 'one-off'. I remember coming home from work, getting the urge to turn on the cabinet and just play. I recorded the session in MAME just in case – but was playing to kind of unwind. I didn't even realise how high I was going until I noticed that I was halfway through the game on my second playthrough and that my score was past the 500,000 mark. The best description I have of the mental feeling is a kind of combat Zen trance. When it was all over, I saw that I had broken 700,000 and I recall a victory cry of sorts being yelled throughout the apartment. [In

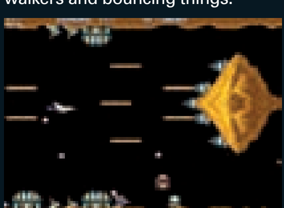


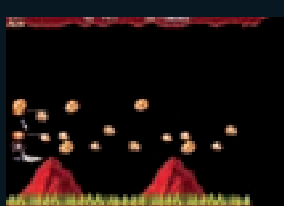
» This is the modified *Operation Wolf* cabinet that Joe uses to hone his *Nemesis* skills.

Know Your Enemy

There are some weird and wonderful baddies residing in deepest, darkest space

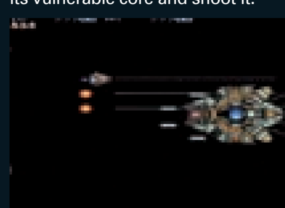
Inner Defences
Having penetrated the enemy stronghold, you're faced with resistance in the form of turrets, walkers and bouncing things.





Active Volcanoes
So what's the best way to survive these erupting rocks at the end of the first stage? Look to the game's demo mode for clues.

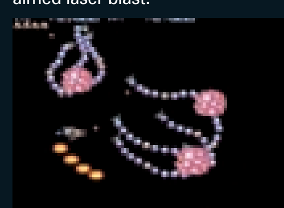
Boss Ship
You'll get used to facing off against this boss ship as it lurks at the end of several stages. Expose its vulnerable core and shoot it.





Moai Heads
Perhaps the most memorable enemy. You must destroy these bubble-blowing heads by blasting their gaping mouths.

Grabbing Gonads
Render these space oddities impotent by removing their grabbing protrusions with a well-aimed laser blast.





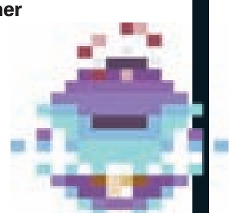
» Displayed proudly on Joe's wall is this 'World Champion' certificate from Twin Galaxies legend Walter Day.

December 2009, Joe managed to top his earlier score and his record now stands at 788,500 points.]

■ The high score on the original coin-op is a pretty crazy 1.2 million by Paul Ashworth, and it has stood for almost 25 years. In your expert opinion, how impressive is Paul's score, and have you set your sights on beating it?
I've never met Paul but that guy is one amazing player. The best assessment I can make is that he must have beaten the game at least three times in a row on a single credit. And due to the game's exponentially increasing difficulty, that's a feat in itself. My ultimate goal is to blow this record totally out of the water. But I'd suffice just to beat it, if only by a couple of hundred points. I try to play this game at least three times a week in the hopes of accomplishing this.

■ How does the difficulty increase on subsequent playthroughs?
On the second playthrough, every other enemy you destroy releases a slightly faster than normal single bullet that is targeted at where you were when you destroyed that enemy. On the third playthrough, every enemy you destroy releases this single bullet, which naturally puts you on the defensive before shooting down everything in front of you, especially in areas where manoeuvrability is tight.

■ Are you planning to attempt high scores on any other games in the future?
I'm interested in setting high scores in all of the *Metal Slug* games, *R-Type I* and *II*, and the coin-op versions of *Salamander*, *Rush 'N Attack*, and *Contra*.



■ If someone was to beat your MAME score, would you try to reclaim it with an even higher score?
I believe so. The time I've invested in playing and enjoying *Nemesis* really encourages competitiveness. Having my score beaten would just encourage me to learn to play harder and take it back. ✱

JOE'S SURVIVAL GUIDE

Expert tips from the high-score holder on how to amass those record-breaking, Twin Galaxies-shaking scores

1 ■ SPEED CONTROL
It's important to find a balance in speed-ups that works for you. Throughout the course of the game, I've found two to be sufficient to manoeuvre and not smack into walls or enemies accidentally. Also, the distance that multiples space out from your ship is directly related to the number of speed-ups you have.

2 ■ KEEP LEFT
The left side of the screen is your friend. Pushing hard left will cause multiples to bunch up onto your ship's position. When equipped with three or four multiples and a laser upgrade, it concentrates your fire into a single line. This makes taking out bosses a lot easier.

3 ■ TRAVEL LIGHT
Nemesis makes itself more challenging based on the number of upgrades you have activated. For example, a maxed-out ship will increase the rate that enemies will attack you. Keep that in mind when approaching troublesome areas.

4 ■ BONUS POINTS
The Moai heads in stage three produce ring bullets that can be shot down for a lot of extra points. If your upgrades are sufficient enough, take a moment to try to shoot them all down before taking out a Moai head with a missile or blast of laser fire. The same goes for the enemy-producing factories.

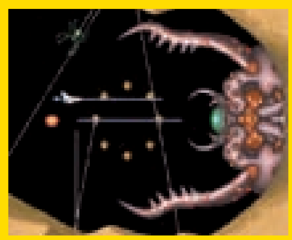
5 ■ UPGRADE PATH
Keep focused on your upgrade bar and plan out your ship upgrades in your head. It's easy in the middle of a button-mash to accidentally give yourself an upgrade you don't want, like the double. After multiple playthroughs, you'll recognise enemy patterns and eventually find a system of upgrades that works for you.

the sequels

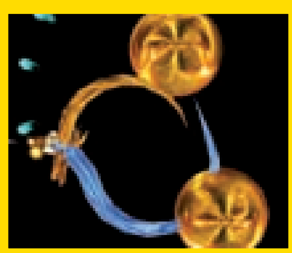
There are too many games to cover, so let's look at the arcade sequels



Gradius II
Released: 1988
For reasons that are not entirely clear, the first coin-op sequel was released in Europe as *Vulcan Venture*, and it was denied a US release entirely. The name change was not fooling anyone, though, as the gameplay and graphics were achingly similar to the original. The power-up system was tweaked slightly – you could now choose between four different upgrade paths, each with new spins on the missile, double and laser weapons, and there were a couple of shield types too. However, you'd need a permanent shield to get anywhere in the game as it was so damned difficult, even on the easiest setting. At least Konami was sensible enough to place the jaw-dropping blazing suns stage right at the beginning, otherwise most players wouldn't have been able to see it.



Gradius III
Released: 1989
Overlooking casual arcade-goers and aiming itself squarely at the *Gradius* hardcore, the third game retained the punishing difficulty level that was quickly becoming a hallmark of the series. The power-up system was further fine-tuned, and there was a new edit option, which let you chop and choose your weapon selection, but no amount of pre-pimping could protect you from the brutal, trigger-happy natures of the game's enemies. If you somehow managed to make it past the third stage, you'd be 'rewarded' with a bizarre 3D mini-stage that played a bit like Sega's *Galaxy Force*, only naturally much more difficult – never have cave walls been so threatening! And God only knows what Konami was thinking when it removed the continue option. That's right: it's back to the beginning for you, Sonny Jim.



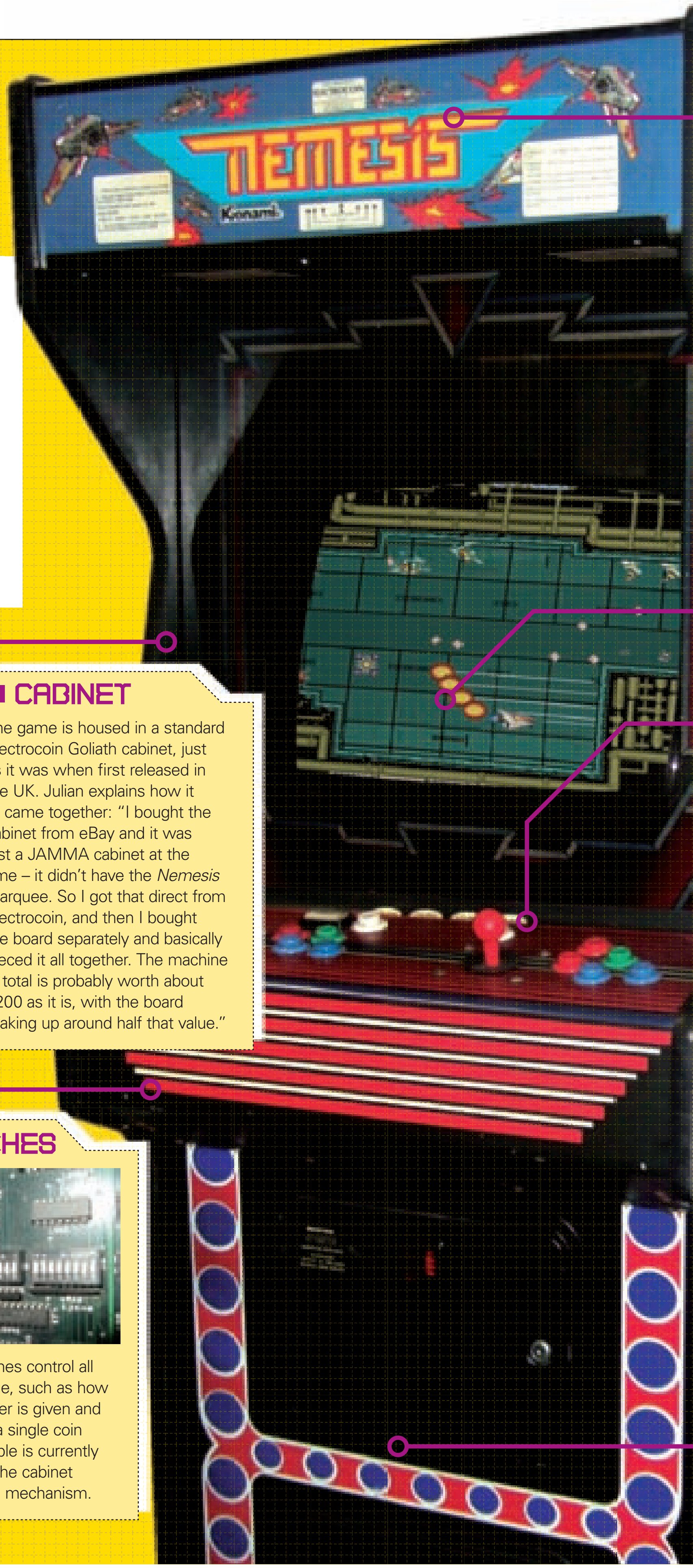
Gradius IV: Revival
Released: 1998
After a hiatus of ten years, *Gradius* returned to the arcades with a new sequel. Sadly, it wasn't really worth the wait. The graphics were improved, or rather rendered, with the game powered by Konami's Hornet hardware, but this actually served to somewhat cheapen the look of the game when you compared it to the classic 2D bitmapped graphics of old. Naturally, more changes were made to the weapon schemes and there were a couple of new configurations to choose from, although the third game's edit mode was absent. If you're curious, try to track down the *Gradius III & IV* pack that was released for the PlayStation 2. You can emulate the original arcade version if you've got a decent PC, but it's probably more trouble than it's worth.

COIN-OP CAPERS
the machine

We dropped in on arcade collector and shoot-'em-up fan Julian Kershaw to get a closer look at his Nemesis arcade machine



"I guess I was brought up on videogames," says Julian, who's self-employed and lives in West Yorkshire. "I was 11 years old in 1980 and fascinated with arcade machines. It was here I found my love for *Nemesis* and *Salamander*. Later I managed to get myself a JAMMA cabinet and a *Salamander* PCB [for £40]. I was living at home with my parents and had no room for anything else. I moved into my own house in 1996, and this provided me with space for more gear. It was around 2000 when I started to get more involved, concentrating heavily on Electrocoin machines. Today my collection is quite big, and it is my hope one day to display these machines to family and friends."



PCB

The board is working, although it occasionally reports an error with ROM 6. "It can be repaired with a little solder work," Julian tells us. "It's just general maintenance really. A previous owner has already replaced a couple of chips on the board."



CABINET

The game is housed in a standard Electrocoin Goliath cabinet, just as it was when first released in the UK. Julian explains how it all came together: "I bought the cabinet from eBay and it was just a JAMMA cabinet at the time – it didn't have the *Nemesis* marquee. So I got that direct from Electrocoin, and then I bought the board separately and basically pieced it all together. The machine in total is probably worth about £200 as it is, with the board making up around half that value."

SIDE ART

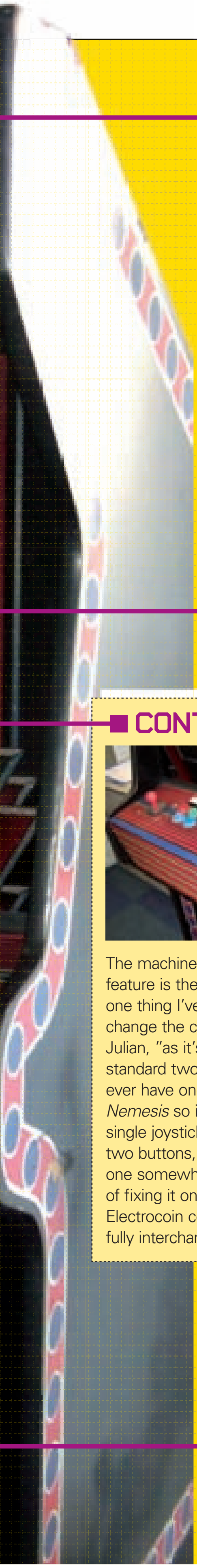


The cabinet artwork is just the generic Electrocoin design, but Julian reveals that wasn't the case for all Konami shooters: "*Salamander* is a bit more special as Electrocoin made a Goliath with special Konami artwork for the game. Anyone can take a Goliath and put *Nemesis* inside it, but the *Salamander* cabinets are a lot harder to find. You see the odd poorly looked after example appear on eBay and nobody seems to know its relevance."

DIP SWITCHES



The operator switches control all aspects of the game, such as how many lives the player is given and how many credits a single coin awards. This example is currently set to free play as the cabinet doesn't have a coin mechanism.

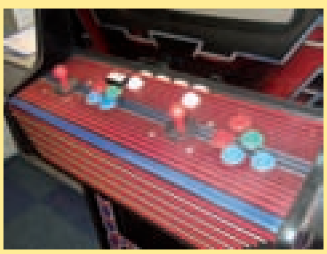


MARQUEE

The colourful marquee lists basic control details and gameplay information. "The marquee header itself is quite rare and is probably worth around £15-20 on its own," says Julian. The marquee lights up by flicking a switch on the top of the cab.



CONTROLS



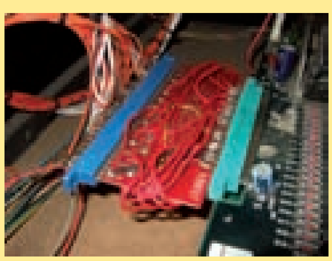
The machine's only non-original feature is the control panel. "The one thing I've got left to do is to change the control panel," says Julian, "as it's currently just a standard two-player one. You only ever have one player at a time on *Nemesis* so it should really have a single joystick in the middle and then two buttons, one each side. I have one somewhere so it's just a case of fixing it on. It's easy because the Electrocoin control panels are all fully interchangeable."

SCREEN

Many Goliath cabinets have a neat screen trick. Julian explains: "You can put any game you like into this machine, and if it's a vertically oriented game, you just take off the glass screen and turn a small wheel to rotate the monitor 90 degrees. Job done."



CONVERTER



The Goliath cab has a JAMMA connector and the PCB has a Konami Classic connector, so this little board just converts one to the other.

developer Q&A

Steve Lockley's company Cyclone converted Nemesis to the Spectrum and Amstrad – with some controversy!

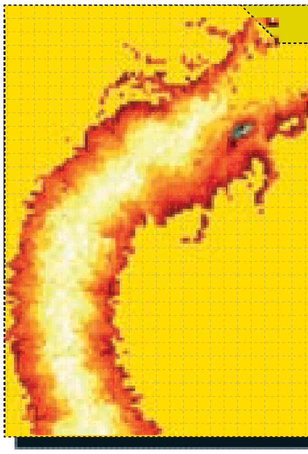
■ Can you start by telling us how you came to be involved in the *Nemesis* conversions?
A company called Nemesis Management Company (NMC) had struck a deal with Konami to convert all future Konami games for the home computer market. The first title to be released under this new arrangement was *Nemesis*, but they had problems with various programmers letting them down and just failing to deliver. This put them in a difficult situation, as money had already been committed to advertising. They needed to find someone who could complete the job from scratch in very limited time and they approached my company, Cyclone. We were asked to produce both a Spectrum and Amstrad version, which needed to be delivered simultaneously. The one thing we didn't have to do was produce the graphics, as these were provided by NMC and were produced by Stuart Ruecroft.

■ What did you think of the original *Nemesis* coin-op?
I never played it. We were given the MSX version of the game to use as reference and not the arcade machine. It would have been nice to play the original, but we needed to crack on with the conversions, as we only had around eight weeks to do them both. There was much emphasis on making it faithful to the MSX version, which basically meant it had to be fairly fast and contain all the levels, with the same or very similar sequence and behaviour of aliens and obstacles.

■ How difficult was it to meet that brief?
Back then you had to get quite creative with your programming to squeeze every last ounce out of the little power and memory that was available. In *Nemesis*, the code controlling the movements of each of the various enemies was similar, though with distinct changes for each type of alien. The various approaches we tried were either too slow or occupied too much memory, so what we did was write self-altering code. There was basically a single control routine, which reprogrammed itself by writing different commands directly into memory over the top of itself to perform the next task required. This way, every time the routine ran it was as quick as possible, as there were no tests for conditions to decide on actions, yet it occupied the smallest amount of memory possible because it only existed once. The only problem was that it was a bitch to debug. If the program crashed you weren't sure what state the routine was in at the time, and trying to reproduce the conditions that caused the crash was therefore really difficult. Given the difficulties with debugging, we were running really, really close to the deadline.



COIN-OP CAPERS
the conversions



Regardless of whether you know it as Gradius or Nemesis, Konami's blaster has had a hell of a life…

02



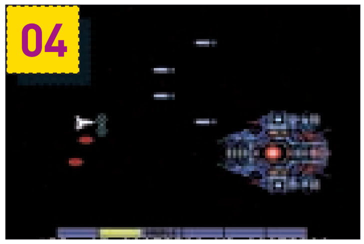
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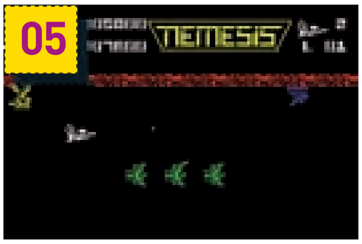
03



04



05



01. PC-Engine
(Best Version)

Here's further proof why NEC's 8-bit is essential for shmup fans. In addition to being highly faithful to the arcade original, it also features an exclusive level that's crawling with a range of skeleton monstrosities. Ported by Konami itself, *Gradius* on the PC-Engine is nigh-on faultless and features a superb remixed soundtrack. Only extended play reveals that it's not quite identical.

02. Game Boy

While it's not quite up to the level of the excellent *R-Type* port, this is nevertheless a slick conversion that holds up extremely well on the Game Boy's tiny screen. A few concessions have been made – only five of the arcade's seven levels have been crammed in – but this is nevertheless very good. Being able to select from any of the five levels is also a nice touch.

03. NES

The NES version proved to be so popular that it was converted to the arcades as part of Nintendo's Playchoice series. It's a very faithful translation of the original game with instantly recognisable sprites, solid representations of each of the arcade's seven levels and surprisingly good music. In fact, the only real issue we have is that it suffers from some truly horrendous flickering. Other than that it's another solid conversion and well worth picking up if you own the machine.

04. MSX

Out of all the 8-bit computers, the MSX version is easily the best, even if it isn't the most authentic in terms of level layout. Graphically it's very nice, with well-detailed sprites, although it does suffer from some very juddering scrolling and is nowhere near as smooth as the C64 outing. There's a bonus level as well, although it's different to the PC-Engine version in terms of layout. Oh and if you have the *TwinBee* cartridge you can play as him instead of a Vic Viper.

05. Spectrum

With just eight weeks to capture the essence of the original and only having the MSX version as a reference, it's no surprise that the Spectrum outing turned out the way it did. Bland levels, questionable collision detection, poor sprites, weedy sound… The problems just go on and on. It's not quite as horrifying as the Amstrad version, but there's little in it. Highly disappointing.

06. NEC PC88

If the Spectrum and Amstrad versions had looked like this we would have been more than happy. Exclusive to Japan, this is a nice port that captures the authenticity of the original. Extremely similar to the Sharp X1 version, this narrowly pips it to the post thanks to more responsive controls and its impressive audio.

07. Commodore 64

While this is head and shoulders above the Spectrum and Amstrad ports, Simon Pick's C64 conversion still falls far behind many of the other 8-bit systems. It's lovely and smooth and the audio is suitably punchy, but control feels rather stodgy and the collision detection isn't always perfect. While it lacks the polish of many of the C64's original blasters, it's nevertheless a fun effort and is only let down by some really bad flickering whenever the screen gets too busy.

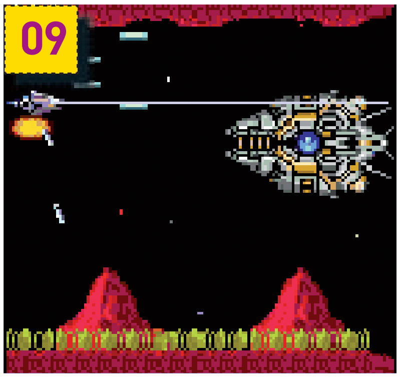
08. Sharp X68000

Like the PC-Engine, MSX and NES versions, this was another conversion by Konami, and graphically













it's the best of the lot. This is a nigh-on perfect rendition of the arcade original – yes, we know the PC, PlayStation, DS and Saturn versions are better, but that's cheating, so we're not including them – with identical level layouts, no stages missing and highly responsive controls. It lacks the PC-Engine's additional level and suffers from fairly weedy sound and music, but this is an otherwise fantastic conversion that shows just how powerful Sharp's machine was.

09. Mobile

The Java-based version of *Gradius* is pretty impressive. It captures many of the elements of the arcade original, has pretty solid visuals and even does a decent stab at replicating the original arcade tunes. It falls down, though, by being rather fiddly to control, and let's face it: if there's one thing a shoot-'em-up needs it's responsive controls. It's a pity the controls let it down, as this is an otherwise authentic experience.

10. Sharp X1

Another Japanese 8-bit conversion that plays far better than its Western counterparts. It's extremely similar to the PC88 version and features well-detailed sprites but rather tinny audio. It's not quite as polished as Konami's MSX version, but considering the hardware it remains a decent, if not outstanding, effort.

11. Amstrad CPC

(Worst Version)

What on earth has happened here? As much as we love Sir Alan Sugar's 8-bit machine, its port of *Nemesis* is truly awful. Jerky scrolling, poorly designed sprites and lame sound effects are the least of your worries, though, as your Vic Viper is even less responsive than the disappointing Spectrum conversion. We may now know the reason for this, but that doesn't mean we have to be happy about it. Easily the worst conversion of *Nemesis* we've ever played.

developer Q&A cont.

» In order to get it debugged and out on time, I worked solid, 24 hours a day, during the last week of production. I knew it was time to call it a day when the hallucinations started! We just managed to hit the deadline, which involved a mad dash across London to the duplicators in High Wycombe.

■ The screenshots that appeared in magazine previews looked very different to the finished game. What's the story behind that?

We were told that it had been agreed with *Sinclair User* to give the magazine a first look to help generate some publicity for the release. The problem was that we were operating to a reduced time frame and the Spectrum version was running a little behind the Amstrad one. The magazine wanted screenshots for the preview but you couldn't really get a decent one from the Spectrum version at that time, so NMC quickly got Stuart to knock up some mocked-up screens. These were literally static screens, with no code behind them at all, and if you look at the resulting shots you will see 'STU' written in the corner. We had no input into this and the problem with an artist's impression is that it's exactly that – there was no consideration of any technical constraints. When we first saw the published shots our reaction was, "Shit, how are we supposed to reproduce that?" We had to do a number of things to the final version to achieve a version that could be released, including shrinking some of the graphics and reducing the active screen size.

■ There's speculation that *Sinclair User* didn't base its glowing review on the final game code. Can you clear that up?

The review version supplied to *Sinclair User* was not completely bug-free, but it was pretty much there. The only change that was done after the review copies were sent out was the removal of the second 'option' weapon, which improved speed and playability. In its review it still used the mocked-up shots instead of taking actual screenshots from the game. I can only assume this was simply sloppiness on its behalf. No 'better' version of *Nemesis* exists. I'm sorry if I've dashed people's hopes of finding some undiscovered gem.

■ Looking back, do you think you could have done a better job of the conversion?

Yes, given more time to get even more creative with the code to avoid shrinking graphics while keeping the speed and improving the use of colour. But advertising was already booked and it would have been expensive to push back the release date any further. It was made clear that the release date was immovable given the delays that NMC had already experienced. ★





» EXPOSING RETRO GAMES THAT ARE PROBABLY BEST LEFT IN THE PAST

LAST ACTION HERO

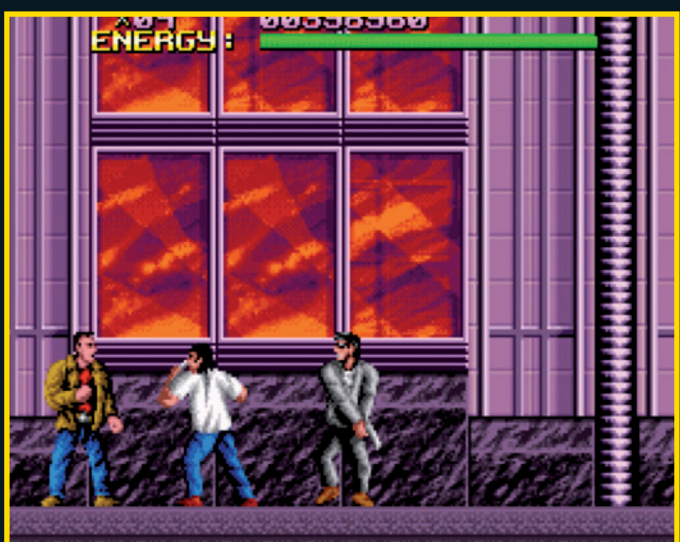


» [SNES] Given the blood, sweat and tears it takes to reach him, the Ripper boss is easy. Tap punch while walking towards him.

GAME INFO



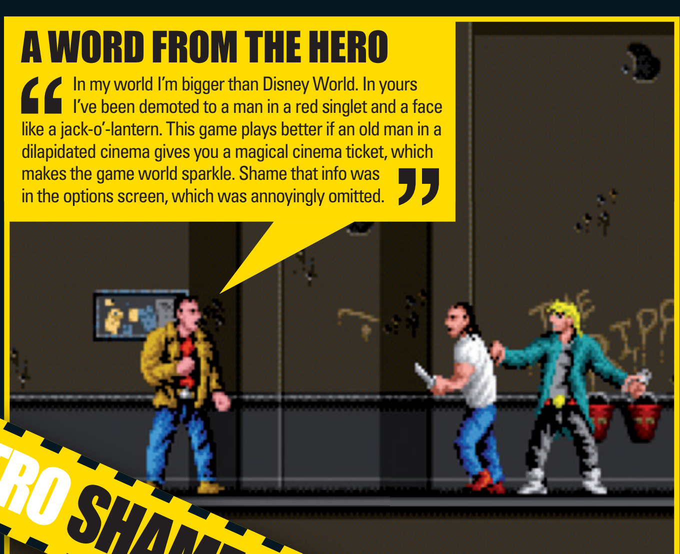
- » **SYSTEM:** SNES
- » **RELEASED:** 1993
- » **PUBLISHER:** SONY IMAGESOFT
- » **DEVELOPER:** BITS STUDIOS



» [SNES] Thanks to save states, we eventually got off the first level. We felt like crooks, but we figured your eyes would appreciate the variety.

A WORD FROM THE HERO

"In my world I'm bigger than Disney World. In yours I've been demoted to a man in a red singlet and a face like a jack-o'-lantern. This game plays better if an old man in a dilapidated cinema gives you a magical cinema ticket, which makes the game world sparkle. Shame that info was in the options screen, which was annoyingly omitted."



While certainly not one of cinema's brightest lights, it's debatable that the *Last Action Hero* movie, by being a pastiche of the action genre, had a modicum of charm. The same cannot be said about the videogames, however. While the Amiga version is guff simply for being easier to complete than a dot-to-dot of an orange, the console version trounces its direness on every level. There's not one redeeming feature in this whole game other than that it's likely it came with a very useful receipt.

The only explanation as to how this game ever got made is this unlikely event whereby someone thought millions of *Last Action Hero* fans would pay £40 to own the hardest first level in any videogame. The game is so bad that, had it been released before the movie, it's probable that the movie could have become the finest game to movie adaptation ever made, given what the film studio would have had to work with: a single level set in a shadowy city inhabited by three types of people: our hero, Jack Slater; a guy with a knife; and a chap in a baseball cap, holding a bat and wearing basketball trainers.

Before we begin giving you a full rundown of our main gripes with the game, we feel it's worth mentioning that, as we never actually managed to get past the first stage without resorting to cheating, all of these issues can be experienced within moments of pressing the start button.

The first thing you notice about *LAH* is that its developer, Bits Studios, forgot to include any kind of option screen. Often this little oversight can be forgiven in games, but you soon discover that the omission is a big problem for *LAH* the very moment your ears take stock of their surroundings, and your patience is greeted by the impenetrable bubble of unfairness that the game is encased in.

Playing around with the face buttons, you'll discover that Jack has an impressive array of moves, including a sweep kick, a useless roundhouse kick, and a jumping split kick that was actually made famous by Jean-Claude Van Damme. But as Jack performs these moves with the urgency and power of someone suffering with brittle bone disease, he often gets repeatedly knifed or smashed in the chest before landing any kind of attack. As a result, you're forced to frequently rely on Jack's fast but frustratingly weak punch most of the time. And as the enemies in the game – the two we officially saw, anyway – are faster than you, have a better reach than you and can absorb about eight hits before they eventually flash and disappear, the game quickly becomes a repetitive battle of infuriating challenge and tedious gameplay.

And problems worsen when enemies bunch up on screen. Get two enemies coming at you standing two pixels apart, and the game's sluggish animation, imprecise controls and uber-powerful enemies work in tandem to make *LAH* one of the most hellish experiences you can have on a games console. Success seems to actually rest on strategy and knowing when your enemies are going to appear on screen so you can vanquish them before they actually appear – a weird technique that eventually saw us reach the end of the first stage… only to then get unfairly surrounded by scores of bunched-up enemies with only a teensy fraction of health and a sweaty punch button for protection.

THE POINTLESS PARTS:



THE SPLIT KICK
Usually, by the time you've performed this stupid-looking move, your character's already been attacked three times.



HEALTH PACKS
It replenishes an unhelpful amount of energy against enemies that hack chunks off your health bar.



LEVELS
The first level of *Last Action Hero* is so frustrating that you're unlikely to see what lies beyond it.

THE MAKING OF... FRENZY



IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** STERN ELECTRONICS

» **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE

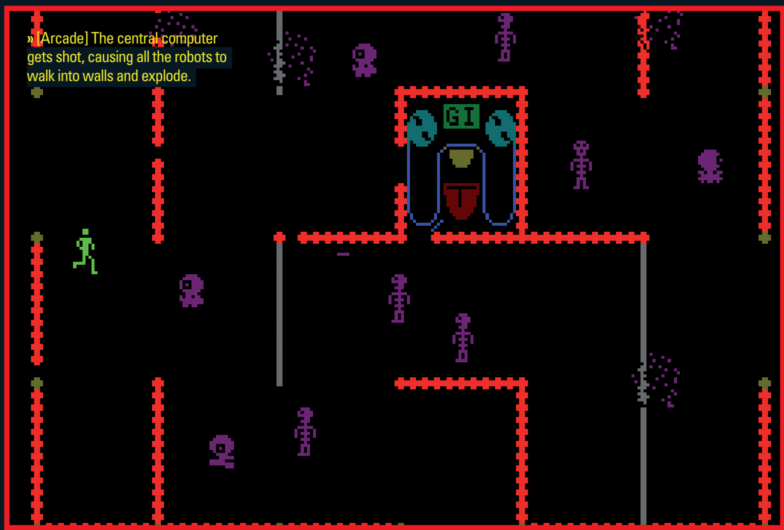
» **PLATFORM:** ARCADE; CONVERTED TO COLECOVISION

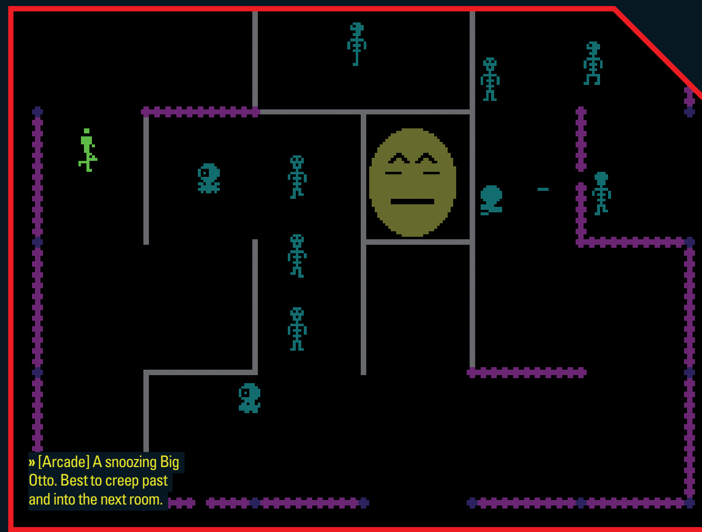
» **RELEASED:** 1982

» **GENRE:** RUN 'N' GUN

» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £250+ FOR AN ORIGINAL CABINET

IT'S NO EASY TASK RAPIDLY PUTTING TOGETHER A GREAT SEQUEL TO ONE OF VIDEOGAMING'S EARLIEST ARCADE HITS, BUT ALAN MCNEIL DID JUST THAT. CRAIG GRANNELL TALKS TO ALAN ABOUT HOW FRENZY CAME TO BE, AND WHY EVIL OTTO BECAME LESS EVIL


» [Arcade] The central computer gets shot, causing all the robots to walk into walls and explode.


» [Arcade] A snoozing Big Otto. Best to creep past and into the next room.

Arena-based shooters can largely be traced back to two games: Atari's *Asteroids* and *Berzerk* from Stern Electronics. The Stern game, conceived by Alan McNeil, was a huge hit, shifting 50,000 units and holding US gamers in thrall until a certain yellow dot-chomper showed up, and it subsequently influenced *Robotron: 2084*, *Xybots*, *Smash TV* and *Geometry Wars*.

A lesser-known game paying homage to *Berzerk* is Stern's own sequel, *Frenzy*, which was again designed by Alan McNeil. Like its predecessor, it tasks you with exploring an endless maze of rooms, battling mechanical foes and trying to survive. But it adds new features, including varied wall types and 'super rooms'. If we're brutally honest, *Frenzy* feels like the game *Berzerk* should have been to start with, which is something that Alan McNeil hints at as we interview him. Many *Berzerk* ideas that were scrapped due to time and ROM limitations ended up in *Frenzy*, making it a more fulfilling game, even if, sadly, it didn't repeat its forebear's success.

Frenzy's story begins the day after Alan McNeil quit Stern. "After *Berzerk*, I was in charge of eight programmers, Stern was driving me hard, and I was a bit resentful," he recalls. "I was getting more stressed and angry. Stern had a theft problem – tubes of ROMs were vanishing from the plant, and a VCR went from the coffee room – and so the boss hired some goon with a lie detector. I was 'interviewed' and asked if I'd stolen the VCR. I told them they were out of their minds and stormed off."

The VP of manufacturing and two associates were subsequently fired for smuggling chips and trying to resell them back to Stern, but Alan's problems didn't end there: "The CEO reacted to my request to give my guys raises and bonuses by telling me the designer of *Space Invaders* had merely 'got a watch and liked it', and he said I should do the same. He was trying to screw my team, and so I quit. I thought I was done with the company – until the call that started *Frenzy*."

This call involved Stern asking Alan if he could quickly put together a sequel that would utilise leftover circuit boards. He wasn't keen, but money became a deciding factor: "It was crazy. They offered me double my old salary in royalties, for a fraction of the work. I had ideas left over from *Berzerk*, so I figured creating a sequel wouldn't be too hard, although during development I ended up working long hours, alone in my basement. I'd work 18 to 36 hours straight, several times over ten days – and then crash for 24!"

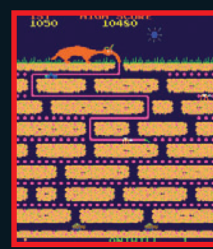
One of the criticisms levelled at *Berzerk* was that it was too easy, although one might argue that this was down to people becoming proficient after playing it so much. "One of the programmers could play all day, because he was so good at letting robot shots go through the running man's neck hole, and so I was told to make *Frenzy* tougher," recalls

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

ASTRO INVADER
SYSTEM: ARCADE
YEAR: 1980

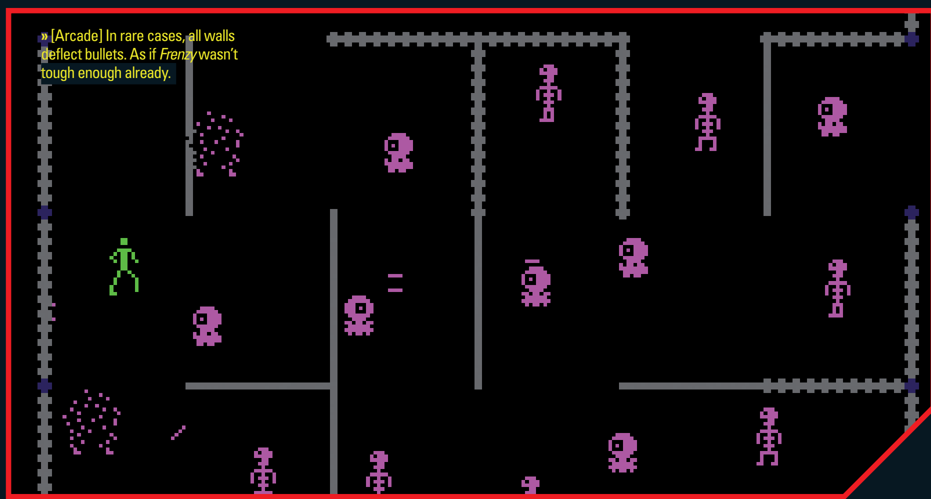
BERZERK
SYSTEM: ARCADE
YEAR: 1980

ANTEATER (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: ARCADE
YEAR: 1982



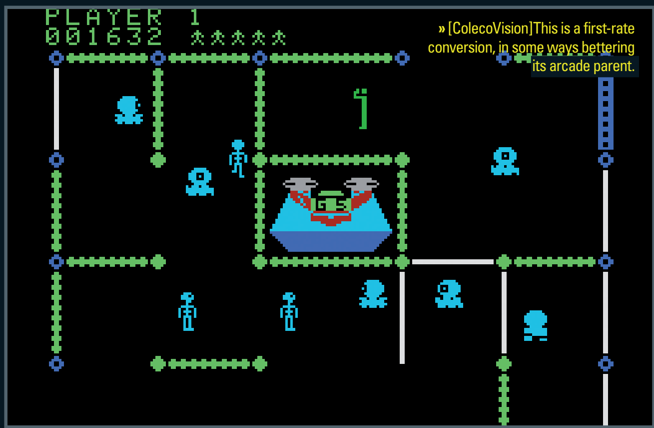


» [Arcade] There's no respite in the robot factory. Enemies are continually churned out, aiming to kill you.


» [Arcade] In rare cases, all walls deflect bullets. As if *Frenzy* wasn't tough enough already.

THE MAKING OF... FRENZY



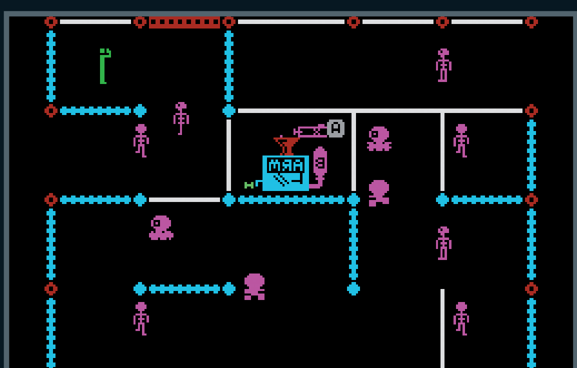


» [ColecoVision] This is a first-rate conversion, in some ways bettering its arcade parent.

CONVERSION CAPERS

Perhaps because of its brutal difficulty or the simple fact that it wasn't as popular as its predecessor, home conversions of *Frenzy* were thin on the ground. In fact, as far as we're aware, only the ColecoVision received a full conversion. Luckily, that release was a gem of a game and a surprisingly faithful version of the coin-op. While it lacks the sampled sounds of the original, it includes all of its other features and special rooms. Importantly, though, it plays well; in fact, given its various difficulty settings and a speed boost, one might argue that it manages to improve on its arcade parent, replacing frustration with protracted battles against robot foes.

Elsewhere, only the ZX Spectrum has games claiming to be *Frenzy*: one released by Quicksilva in 1982, and another by Spectrum Games Ltd in 1983. But since the latter was rebadged *Robotics* by Ocean and both are clear rip-offs of *Berzerk* rather than *Frenzy*, it seems likely that neither was licensed from Stern.



Alan. He notes that arcade owners had, by the early Eighties, started to "ruin" the arcade industry by insisting on absurdly short default play times for every quarter that a player inserted. "They demanded a 30-second average game, which I felt was outrageous," says Alan. "Going to a movie cost about five bucks back then, and at 110 or so minutes long, you got about a minute of entertainment per five cents. My thinking was that a decent player should get five minutes' play for 25 cents."

The miserly attitude surrounding Alan extended to the technology available for *Frenzy*. Because Stern refused to buy a new chip and the price of sound encoding was high, Alan was forced to stick with the digital speech created for *Berzerk*, but restrictions removed that game's constant background chatter from the sequel. "*Frenzy*'s tight fit into its ROM caused things to be squeezed out – at one point, I even had to find 24 bytes for a longer copyright notice. Voices were one of the things I had to remove," says Alan, who adds that the market research guy (see 'Market research' boxout) decided, for reasons unknown to any sane person, that *Frenzy* should have "less talking" than *Berzerk* anyway.

With the available resources and within imposed limitations, Alan was nonetheless determined to bring value to *Frenzy*, largely by giving players new experiences. He says that he "felt something was needed to spice up the endless maze", but that he "didn't really want to change the basic gameplay – just to add more tension". Possibilities that he jotted down included new enemies, more and faster bullets, changing walls and special rooms.

In the end, *Berzerk*'s bulky bipedal robots were replaced by trundling tanks and skinny skeleton-like droids; Alan admits the latter type was added because he "had leftover Halloween stuff laying around and thought skeletons would be a nice change". And as you'd expect for a game of *Frenzy*'s age, creating new artwork for these characters was done in a suitably primitive fashion.

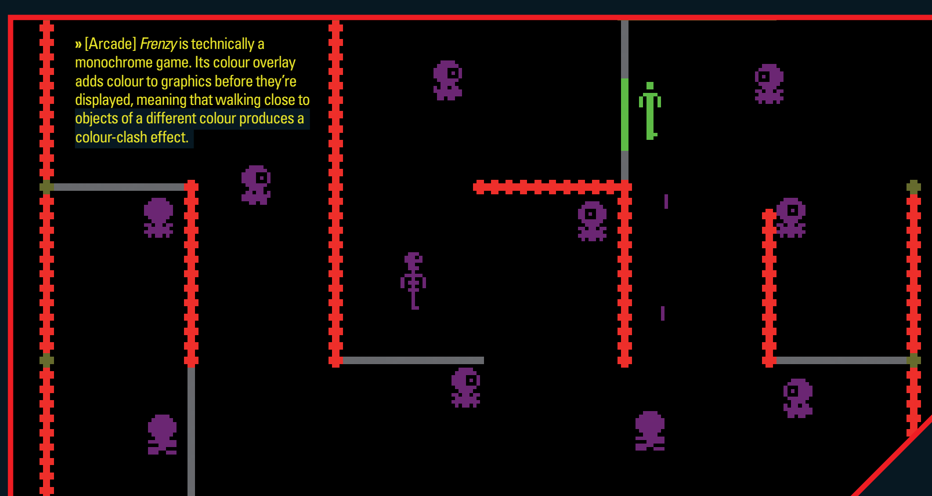
"I'd get out a pad of graph paper and mark an X in every square I wanted white. Then I'd convert Xs to 1s and blanks to 0s and make the whole pattern into a string of hexadecimal numbers," explains Alan. "I'd then get to do it all again to make the animation of the feet. Once all the patterns were ready and the animation sequence was set, I'd run a test of the animation. There were often glitches – sometimes I'd forget a whole line and the character would get shorter for one step of the animation!"

Alan recalls spending lots of time on artwork, but less on robot AI code, which required only a little tweaking for the different kinds of robots, to stop them hitting walls. Although *Berzerk*'s AI routines were barely touched, a restriction was soon placed on *Frenzy*'s skeletons, only enabling them to move along the X/Y axis, unlike the tanks, which move freely in eight directions. "When I first added the skeletons, all the robots attacked in the same way and tended to bump into each other too quickly – you'd enter a room and half the enemies would explode within seconds, and that wasn't going to work for the game," says Alan. "With minimal code and space available to me, limiting the motion of one of the enemies made sense, and it only took a few bytes of code to make this change."

As already noted, the other main adjustment in *Frenzy* was to the environment, and the reworked walls hugely affect the way the game is played. Instead of *Berzerk*'s lethal electrified walls, *Frenzy* offers walls where portions can be blasted away, enabling you to carve out escape routes, or to embark on Wild West-style shooting by removing



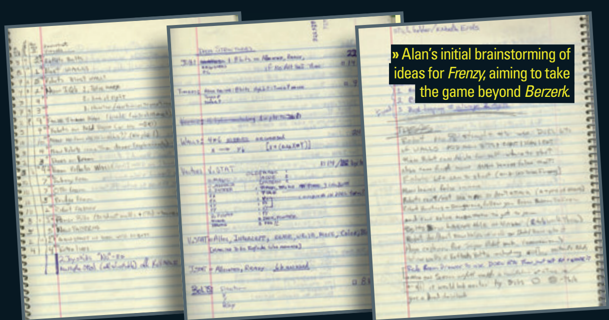
» [Arcade] Dead again. Our hero turns a rather fetching shade of blue after getting zapped.



» [Arcade] *Frenzy* is technically a monochrome game. Its colour overlay adds colour to graphics before they're displayed, meaning that walking close to objects of a different colour produces a colour-clash effect.

MARKET RESEARCH

In the early days of the videogames industry, it's safe to say that you often got a fairly pure vision of whatever a game's creator was trying to do. Focus testing was rare, but that doesn't mean companies weren't keen to bring in the tried-and-tested 'sanity checking' that works so well – and by 'well', we mean 'badly' – in the worlds of movies and TV. "Once I'd got *Frenzy* working on my kit, Stern was anxious to playtest it, and they hired this market research guy," recalls Alan. "One Saturday, he brought to the plant ten kids from the local arcades, and they all got to play *Frenzy* in a real cabinet. He asked them a load of questions and surveyed them while the boss and I sat in a corner of the room, watching. Eventually, he introduced me and I got to ask them if they liked certain new features that I had in mind, such as the robot factory, and they liked every idea. After they left, the marketing guy told us the kids loved the game and suggested I went ahead and added all the things I wanted to. Stern wasted a whole bunch of money on that!"



» Alan's initial brainstorming of ideas for *Frenzy*, aiming to take the game beyond *Berzerk*.



section of walls and blasting robots through the gaps. The other wall type deflects shots, meaning you have to always keep an eye out for stray bullets, but you can also potentially kill robots lurking around corners. "The wall changes occurred because in *Berzerk* I really hated bumping into them and dying," admits Alan, and he says the replacements were carefully considered: "The reflective walls hark back to a favourite game of mine on the PLATO system, called *Moonwar*. The edges of the screen were treated as mirrored and you tried to shoot your enemy by firing at an angle. I liked all the weird things that bouncing bullets could do."

As for the walls that could be shot away, this dealt with another of Alan's frustrations with *Berzerk*: "In that game, you'd occasionally get robots you couldn't shoot, because they were stuck in a 'room' with walls on all sides – and I wanted a way to shoot them!"

Destructible walls also came in handy for *Frenzy*'s 'super rooms', which enable you to battle your way towards a special feature somewhere within: a power plant that, when shot, disables the robots; Big Otto (referred to as 'Mama Otto' by Alan); a robot factory; and a central computer that Alan calls his "gift to the player", because when the computer is shot, robots start firing erratically and explode when they collide with walls. Evil Otto, *Berzerk*'s deadly psycho smilie that homes in on you if you linger too long in a room, was also another gift of sorts, because in *Frenzy* he's no longer indestructible. Each time you shoot him, he gets angrier, but a third shot kills him off – only for another, more ferocious Otto to emerge and seek you out. "That was down to friends suggesting that it would be nice for you to be able to shoot him," says Alan. "And that led to the 'Mama Otto' room. Hell hath no fury like Mama Otto – shoot an Otto in her room and she launches a bunch of them towards you at high speed!"

Alan reveals that these rooms tied in to his own storyline concept for *Berzerk* and *Frenzy*: "In my head, *Berzerk* was about some bloke who was being experimented on by the robots and was desperately trying to escape, and *Frenzy* was about an invasion of the robot ship. You're the only one left of your squad, and you're trying to blow the ship up." Although Alan says he couldn't allow a player to reach that final goal, he had hoped to include a critical, well-defended screen where you could take out legions of robots. "In the end, I had more room ideas than I could fit into the ROM. I also wanted a kind of 'subway station' room where an arriving car would unload a huge number of robots. While you were busy dealing with them, another car would arrive with more, kind of like a super robot factory room. Unfortunately, this had problems because overlapping robots would blow up."

On release, Alan recalls that *Frenzy* "did what it was supposed to do", in that it cleaned out Stern's inventory, but there wasn't to be a happy ending regarding Alan's career in the industry. "I had trouble getting paid for *Frenzy*, and although my agent did help get my money from Stern over the next year, he also tried negotiating a contract for me with Williams, but he had so many new ideas regarding things like satellite and cable rights that he scared them off," he says. "At the time, I was located a long commute out of Chicago, and married with a baby boy. My wife said many times that any industry based on the whims of 14-year-old boys is doomed!"

Subsequently, Alan briefly worked for Epyx, but the company cooled to his interest in the Macintosh, and none of his videogame pitches to Williams and EA came to fruition. "In fact, *Frenzy* was supposed to be the beginning of multi-part mission-oriented plotting, and soon after its release I proposed a multi-tank strategy game that was like a mini *Command & Conquer*," he recalls, sadly noting that the ahead of its time concept didn't pique anyone's interest. "And so the last game I did was for MacroMind – a conversion and upgrade of *MazeWars* from the old MIT game," he says. "Now, I'm maintaining servers and websites, and before that I ran two ISPs. Sometimes I'm tempted to make new games, but it'd have to be for phones or the web – 3D gaming seems to require a big team to get things done."

"The boss hired some goon with a lie detector. I told them they were mad and stormed off"





» Alan's S-100 development system that was used to make *Frenzy*.





The Legend Of The Mystical Ninja

With its lush visuals, buckets of charm, humour, wonderful music, and world that meshed elements from platform, puzzle, shmup and RPG games, the West's first entry in the *Mystical Ninja* (aka *Ganbare Goemon*) series of games is one of the craziest platform games to appear on the Super Nintendo. Stuart Hunt puffs on his smoking pipe and inhales the madness of *The Legend Of The Mystical Ninja*.

THE EVOLUTION OF GOEMON



MR GOEMON

Arcade, 1986

For his arcade debut, originally Goemon's look took cues from traditional Ukiyo-e paintings. The game was a quirky side-scrolling run-and-jump game that played similarly to the platform sections in *The Legend Of The Mystical Ninja*.



GANBARE GOEMON

Famicom, 1986

For Goemon's first console release, the Ukiyo-e look was dropped – though not in the game's box art – in favour of a more anime-looking cartoon sprite. We think the white parts in his eyes make him look a little angry, though.



GANBARE GOEMON 2

Famicom, 1989

The Famicom sequel, which was the first to introduce the co-op mode and Ebisumaru, opted to make Goemon look like a character in the comic strip *Peanuts*, with a change of hairstyle that he would keep in subsequent exploits.



LEGEND OF THE MYSTICAL NINJA

SNES, 1991

The added muscle of the Super Nintendo allowed Konami to breathe more personality into the character. This the first incarnation of Goemon with his blue-tinted hair and red and yellow outfit.



GANBARE GOEMON 2

SNES, 1993

The Goemon sprite in the SNES follow-up to the original didn't really deviate much from the original. The only notable difference is that the sprite looks more detailed, slightly chunkier and has spikier hair.



GANBARE GOEMON: SHIN SEDAI SHUUMEI

PlayStation, 2001

A series reboot of sorts, this PlayStation game reimagined the *Goemon* world by setting it in the future and going all *Dragon Ball* in the looks department.

MEMORABLE MOMENTS

WHY IS IT A CLASSIC?



It has something for everyone

Easily the best aspect of *The Legend Of The Mystical Ninja* is the sheer amount of variety that Konami managed to cram in. Bursting at the seams with character and diversity, the second you boot the game you are greeted by wacky and humorous enemies and bosses, a world brimming with things to discover, and various little nods to other Konami franchises. You can't help but get immersed in the world. While the game can admittedly be a slow burn to begin with, this is largely due to the game throwing so much at you so quickly. Once you settle into the game you can't help but be captivated.

HOW DOES IT PLAY?



A game of two halves

The basic gameplay of *Mystical Ninja* is divided into two sections. The first section of each stage is reminiscent of titles like *Jack The Nipper* and *Everyone's A Wally*, and takes its cues from the NES series. Set inside various hamlets, full of quirky and often bizarre enemies, these sections show off the amount of effort that Konami put into the game. The second sections are more typical side-scrolling platformer bits, with tricky jump sequences, imaginative levels, and a large array of enemies and bosses to duff up. The contrast of the two styles works well to offer a platform game with far more character than its peers.

BEST MECHANIC



Kid Ying and Dr Yang

First introduced in *Ganbare Goemon 2* on the Famicom, one of the best elements of *Mystical Ninja* was the fact that two players could play through the game together as Goemon and his odd sidekick Ebisumaru, named Kid Ying and Dr Yang respectively in the West. Save for signature weapons, the differences between the characters are nominal, but the co-op mode does have its benefits. The characters can ride on each other's backs, allowing one to focus on attacking while the other moves. While this may sound a little awkward, it actually makes negotiating the trickier platform sections in the game a little bit easier.

BEST BOSS



Memories from a geisha

There are plenty of memorable end-level bosses in the game, so picking one wasn't easy. In the end, we went with this thing: a chubby samurai tag team that changes into a giant floating head that looks like Gordon Brown made up to look like a geisha girl. Admittedly, we picked this boss entirely for that reason. If you're looking for a more sensible motive from us then we also like the way that whenever you hit this thing it grows until it envelops the entire screen, like something from a Roald Dahl story. It makes your job hitting it easier, but avoiding getting smothered by its chilling smile is much harder.

STANDOUT MOMENT



More than you can shake a pipe at

One of the best elements is the sheer amount of stuff there is to see and do in the town sections. You can place a bet on a horse race, partake in a quiz show, explore some cavernous 3D mazes, or even play some mini-games, including a one-level version of Konami's classic shooter *Gradius*. While rarely necessary to actually go exploring inside the towns – in all of the stages bar one, if we remember rightly, you can dash through these sections to reach the platform bits – these asides are a great way to replenish health, stock up on lives or simply take a much-needed break from the action.

BEST POWER-UP



Cat statues

Look out for the grey kitten statues that are randomly dropped by enemies, as they power up your weapons. Ying bonks his enemies on the noggin using a smoking pipe, while Yang uses his flute. The first phase will extend them, offering you a better reach, and the second will transform them into a yo-yo for Ying and a party blower for Yang. As well as this, each character can also use the money they find as a projectile weapon – a neat feature – and several different judo moves too, ranging from temporary flight and an attack that smites multiple enemies on screen, to a neat animal companion to ride on.



What the press said… ages ago

Mean Machines

"The Japanese excel at producing cutesy-style games, and *Goemon* must rank as one of the finest examples yet, with brilliant sprites and varied backdrops."

What we think

Mystical Ninja hasn't lost any of its charm. Actually, we found returning to the game as enjoyable an experience as when we first discovered it many moons ago. The graphics still look great, the music is still toe-tappingly catchy and the humour is still funny. A timeless classic, then.



IN THE KNOW

- **PLATFORM:** SNES
- **PUBLISHER:** KONAMI
- **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- **RELEASED:** 1991
- **GENRE:** PLATFORM
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £10-15

sinclair ZX80

SPECIFICATIONS

Year released: February 1980
Original price: £79.95 (kit), £99.95 (assembled)
Processor: Zilog Z80A (running at 3.5MHz)
RAM: 1KB (expandable to 16KB)
ROM: 4KB (expanded 8KB ROM later available)
Onboard language: Sinclair BASIC
Display: 32x25 characters
Associated magazines: *Sinclair User, ZX Computing*

IN THE BEGINNING THERE WAS THE ZX80. THEN THE ZX80 BEGAT THE ZX81, AND THE ZX81 BEGAT THE ZX SPECTRUM, AND SO BEGAN BRITAIN'S LOVE AFFAIR WITH THE HOME COMPUTER. MARTYN CARROLL LOOKS BACK AT THE MODEST LITTLE MICRO THAT STARTED IT ALL



When people write about the Spectrum, it's almost mandatory to prefix the machine with the word 'humble'. As in the humble Speccy, with its limited colour palette, primitive 'beeper' sound, a maximum 48KB of memory, and its silly rubber keyboard. But when placed alongside its primitive forebear, the ZX80, the Spectrum looks more like that all-powerful WOPR thing out of *WarGames*.

In comparison, the ZX80 featured a monochrome display, no sound output, a measly 1KB of memory and an awkward membrane keyboard. To hamstring things further, the processor at the machine's heart was required to do everything, from reading keyboard inputs to updating the screen, and it obviously couldn't multitask, so the display would flick off when a key was pressed or the CPU was busy executing a program, which, to all intents and purposes, ruled out animated games. Only a couple of years separated the release of the ZX80 and the Spectrum, but there's almost a generation gap between the two machines – a clear sign of the speed at which the personal computer market was moving in the early Eighties. Component costs were tumbling, innovation was rocketing, and computers that were actually useful in an everyday sense were invading homes and businesses. The ZX80 may have been quickly superseded, yet it played a key role in demystifying and popularising the micro, particularly in the UK. It also provided Sinclair with the impetus to expand the ZX line. After all, we wouldn't even be banging on about the Spectrum were it not for the groundwork laid by the ZX80.

The development of the ZX80 can be traced back to 1978. In June that year, Clive Sinclair's micro-computing arm Science of Cambridge released the MK-14, a kit computer with a calculator keypad and an 8-digit LED display that retailed for £40. Although the assembled kit was of little practical use, it was the perfect, low-cost training aid for students or hobbyists who wanted to learn about microprocessors. It's difficult to determine just how many kits were sold – reported figures vary from 10,000 to 50,000 – but it was successful enough to show Sinclair that computers were a market that could be tapped, even if it was just to raise funds for other ventures within his business.



» The development of the ZX80 was very much a gamble that paid off handsomely for Sinclair.

In 1979, following Sinclair's resignation from his Radionics firm, of which the government's National Enterprise Board had taken a controlling interest, he focused his attention on Science of Cambridge and began to plan a successor to the MK-14. Looking to the US, he saw the big three machines – the Apple II, the Tandy TRS-80 and the Commodore PET – and while they were proper desktop computers designed for real-world application, they were also hugely expensive. The retail prices were even more prohibitive in the UK, where import dealers would, in time-honoured tradition, simply swap the dollar sign for a pound sign and effectively double the price. Sinclair's notion of selling inexpensive consumer products certainly didn't embrace computers retailing at £1,000, nor even half that amount. In fact, he distanced himself from the Newbrain micro project while still at Radionics because its planned scope meant that he wouldn't be able to sell it cheap enough to attract a wide enough market. So he set about developing the ZX80 as a capable, low-cost computer that he could retail for that magic, consumer-pleasing price of £100.

It was a noble aim, but Sinclair was a businessman and he knew that any product still had to turn a tidy profit.



> "Only a couple of years separated the release of the ZX80 and the Spectrum, but there's almost a generation gap between the two machines"

INSTANT EXPERT

- The processor inside most ZX80s was not actually a true Z80A, but rather a copy by NEC named the 780-C.
- John Grant, the creator of Sinclair BASIC, originally suggested that Forth might be a better choice of programming language for the ZX80. He was overruled. Sinclair later published a version of Forth for the ZX81.
- Rick Dickinson is often identified as the ZX80's industrial designer, but it was actually John Pemberton who designed the casing. Dickinson did design the RAM packs for the computer.
- Like a lot of Sinclair's most memorable products, it was a marvel of miniaturisation, measuring 208mm by 159mm – that's roughly half the size of the page you're currently reading.
- It was extremely light and portable, too, weighting just 340 grams.
- There were very few external connectors – a TV out to connect a standard television, ear and mic ports for a cassette recorder to save and load programs on tape and an edge connector for attaching memory packs and peripherals.
- The first ZX80s to be sold were assembled by an electronics outfit in St Ives, but when demand outstripped supply, production was moved to the Timex factory in Dundee.
- After launching in the UK, the ZX80 was exported to many countries around the world including the US, Germany, France, Australia and Japan.
- The expanded 8KB ROM essentially turned the ZX80 into a ZX81, with the exception of the NMI generator. However, third-parties offered their own hardware solutions, which blessed the ZX80 with SLOW mode.
- The ZX80 could use the black 16KB RAM packs designed for the ZX81. With the 8KB ROM, and an upgraded power supply, it could also power the ZX Printer.





To keep the component budget down, long-standing Sinclair engineer Jim Westwood put together a simple hardware design based around the Z80A processor, which consisted entirely of off-the-shelf chips. It wasn't particularly innovative – and the aforementioned flickering display was an unfortunate flaw – but it was a considerable step on from the MK-14. The board and its 21 chips were housed inside a moulded plastic two-piece case designed in-house by John Pemberton. The most curious element of the ZX80's industrial design was the pressure-sensitive 'keyboard', which was basically a plastic sheet with 40 keys printed on it, and by prodding a key, contact would be made with the circuit board tracks beneath and the key press would be registered. It was cheap and not entirely cheerful, particularly after prolonged use.



Further compromises were made with the internal software. A 4KB ROM was provided to store the ZX80's system software, including BASIC, and the unenviable task of trying to cram so much onto such a tiny chip was handed to John Grant of Nine Tiles. Using the ANSI Minimal BASIC standard as reference, Grant spent the summer of 1979 creating the very first version of Sinclair BASIC. In order to meet the 4KB limit, some commands and functionality had to be dropped, with one of the main drawbacks being that the ZX80 could only deal with whole numbers. The dialect was aimed very much at beginners and introduced the one-touch keyword entry system that would become the hallmark of Sinclair BASIC. This idiosyncratic approach ensured that commands could not be mistyped, and to further reduce the chance of errors on code execution, the syntax of each line was checked for faults as it was entered. Considering the restrictions of the ROM chip, Grant's work was mightily impressive and must surely have helped establish BASIC as the language of choice for home micro manufacturers.

The ZX80 was officially launched at a London computer fair in February 1980 and made available to buy direct from Science of Cambridge. Sinclair wanted to market the first ready-assembled computer to break the £100 threshold, and that's exactly what he did. An assembled ZX80 retailed for £99.95, and if you were handy with a soldering iron, you could buy the kit for £79.95. The first review appeared in the April 1980 issue of *Personal Computer World* magazine. "The ZX80 offers an ideal introduction to computing," wrote David Tebbutt. "It makes BASIC easy to learn, it's small enough for it not to be intimidating, and it's cheap enough that, should you decide computing is not for you, you can give it away, sell it or whatever. The ZX80 appears to be a well thought out machine both in terms of hardware and software, leaving me very little to say except that I hope Mr Sinclair and his merry men of Cambridge can cope with the expected flood of orders." Perhaps Tebbutt had previous experience of Sinclair's haphazard mail order operation, because the orders did indeed flood in and, predictably, many customers had to wait months for their machines to arrive.

As the ZX80 wasn't sold through shops, actual sales data is hard to pin down. An article in *Practical Computing* magazine from July 1982 claimed that Sinclair ordered enough component parts to make exactly 100,000 ZX80s – and sold all of them. In April 1983, Sinclair announced that his was the first company to sell more than 1 million home computers worldwide, and this figure included 130,000 ZX80s. More conservative reports estimate that sales were somewhere between 50,000 and 70,000. Even if sales reached the lower end of that estimation, it was still a considerable achievement. Its success was all the more startling because, even with a sub-£100 price tag, the ZX80 was far from an impulse purchase. What sealed the deal for many potential buyers, especially in the UK, was the reputation of Clive Sinclair himself. After all, computers were just the latest addition to his firm's range of innovative products, which included pocket calculators, digital watches and miniature TVs. Sinclair was Britain's favourite boffin, and general punters were far more likely to trust 'Uncle Clive' than some new start-up or some faceless computer conglomerate from across the Pond.

Despite impressive sales of the ZX80, Sinclair did not attempt to capitalise with a slew of upgrade options. At launch, an improved 8KB ROM was promised that would beef up the BASIC with improved mathematical and file-handling functions, but for the first 12 months of the ZX80's life, owners had to make do with official RAM packs. The first of these housed 1-3KB of RAM, with the full 3KB complement costing an eye-watering £60. One ZX80 owner who was not willing to fork out that much money was Nick Lambert of Southampton, who decided to build his own 3KB RAM pack instead. Seeing that it was possible to undercut Sinclair, he went on to start a business and sold his memory upgrades



» This unique ZX80 with clear plastic casing was a test created by the moulding company. It's currently part of Rick Dickinson's private collection.



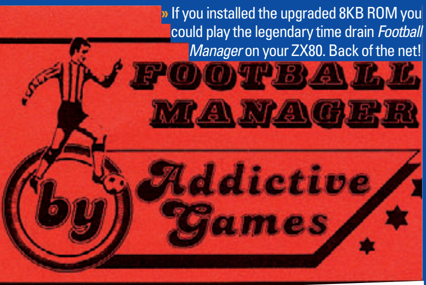
COSTLY KIT

It's well-known that ZX80s are sought after these days, with boxed examples fetching upwards of £200, but one recent eBay auction eclipsed all others. On offer was a mint, unassembled ZX80 kit, and the winning bid was a head-spinning £1,500!

RG contacted the seller, Tim Starkie, and he told us that the transaction completed without a problem and the buyer, who was based in Poland, was happy with his purchase. But what's the story behind the kit itself? Tim says: "I bought the kit in 1981 when I was trying to get a job at Sinclair, to show some interest and enhance my application. This was sadly unsuccessful. I actually managed to join Sinclair in 1984 and worked on the design of the flat-screen TV and the Spectrum 128. It was due to the Sinclair exposure in the recent *Micro Men* TV programme that I decided to sell the ZX80 kit – I thought that the heightened awareness may increase the selling price. Was I in for a surprise! I never thought it would be worth that much. Several of the unsuccessful buyers have since contacted me to say they wished they had bought it. One of my work colleagues said that my future grandsons will say, 'Stupid granddad. He sold that kit for £1,500 in 2009 and now it's worth £10,000!'"







» If you installed the upgraded 8KB ROM you could play the legendary time drain *Football Manager* on your ZX80. Back of the net!



» Quicksilva's Nick Lambert started the company out of his back bedroom in Southampton.



» Quicksilva gave its ZX80 games the professional touch by commissioning artist Steinar Lund to create out-of-this-world covers.



» The 8KB ROM upgrade for the ZX80 came with a keyboard overlay, which featured all of the new commands.

COMMUNITY THE BEST ZX80 RESOURCES ON THE WEB

Grant's ZX80 Site
tinyurl.com/gp7au

■ If you're a technically minded retro nutter then Grant Searle's ZX80 website is an absolute must. His hardware page provides a detailed guide to building your own ZX80 using off-the-shelf components that are readily available today. It even includes authentic keyboard overlays to print out and use.



Scot's ZX80 Site
tinyurl.com/yjwatdq

■ There's nothing unique about Scot's small site, but it serves to pull together all the interesting ZX80 information scattered around the web, including manuals, reviews, and adverts. It also includes the *Space Intruders* program that you can download and run in an emulator. No$ZX81 is our recommended emulator.



ZX80/81 Forums
tinyurl.com/ykb8q9n

■ If you're looking for general information or specific technical advice, you can guarantee that the knowledgeable bunch on here will be able to help you out. The forum also includes sales and wanted sections where users can trade bits of kit. The admin is well-respected Sinclair enthusiast Rich Mellor.

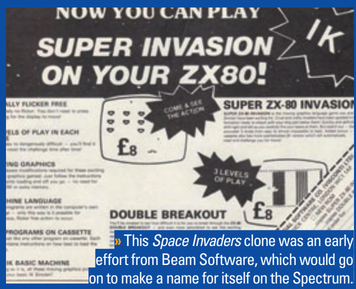


ZX81 Stuff
tinyurl.com/ykgtqlh

■ This site really is the ZX81 equivalent of World of Spectrum, as it includes information on hundreds of games and provides the files for you to emulate them. The interest for ZX80 fans is that a number of 81 games also work on the 80, providing it had the 8KB ROM fitted, so you can uncover those here.







» This *Space Invaders* clone was an early effort from Beam Software, which would go on to make a name for itself on the Spectrum.

via mail order for £40. Nick named his company Quicksilva and released a number of expansions for the ZX80, including a nifty sound board. He also began experimenting with games and programmed a version of the arcade hit *Defender* for the ZX80.

The general thinking was that animated games were not possible on the machine due to the flickering display, but ingenious coders worked out a way to overcome the problem. The breakthrough was made by Ken MacDonald of Macronics Systems, who wrote an interrupt routine. Basically, he realised that the CPU was only updating the display 80 per cent of the time due to the vertical blanking interval. During this period, when no picture information was being actively generated, code could be timed to run without affecting the display. He named the routine Amazing Active Display and used it to create ZX80 games based on *Breakout* and *Space Invaders*. The program listing for the latter, titled *Space Intruders*, gained exposure after being published in the book *Making The Most Of Your ZX80* by Tim Hartnell. Other programmers then used MacDonald's method to write their own smoothly animated games. If you picked up issues of *Personal Computer World* or *Practical Computing* in early 1981, you'd find a small number of ads for ZX80 games on cassette. They were mostly arcade clones or board games, with the two best-known developers being Quicksilva and Bug-Byte. The ZX software scene would soon flourish, though, with the unveiling of the ZX81 in March 1981.





The ZX81 was very much an updated ZX80 rather than a new computer – indeed, development titles for the machine included ZX80 II and ZX80 Series B. Screen flicker was overcome by the inclusion of a non-maskable interrupt generator, and it shipped with the long-awaited 8KB ROM, which was also sold separately as an upgrade for ZX80 owners. The main change, however, was the reduction of the number of internal chips from 21 in the ZX80 to a mere four in the ZX81. This redesign meant Sinclair could offer more features for less money – just £49.95 for the kit or £69.95 ready-built. The new price and spec saw ZX81 sales rocket past those of its predecessor, with 1 million units sold during its first two years.

It's often suggested that the ZX80 kick-started the home computing craze in the UK. However, in truth, the ZX81 deserves to take more credit, thanks mainly to the sheer numbers sold and the home-grown industry that sprang up to support it. But in its own right, the ZX80 was a plucky contender that perfectly realised Sinclair's aim of making computing accessible and affordable to the man on the street.

And just like that all-powerful WOPR thing out of *WarGames*, it too could play a perfect game of tic-tac-toe.

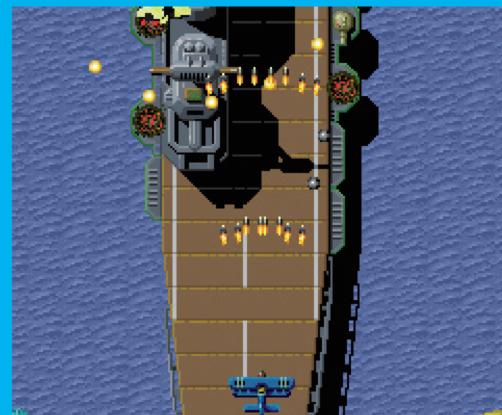
Special thanks to Tony Barnett for supplying us with his own personal ZX80

WHY YOU MUST PLAY…

FLYING SHARK



[Arcade] Take out those top turrets and you'll discover some tanks that are hidden inside. Very sneaky stuff.



[Arcade] *Flying Shark*'s action is fast and furious and never lets up.



[Arcade] Your smart bomb won't kill everything on screen, but it looks nice.

LOOKING DATED IN A GENRE RENOWNED FOR AWESOME FIREPOWER, BULLET HELLS, HUGE BOSSES, ROCKING SOUNDTRACKS AND GRUELLING GAMEPLAY, FIND OUT WHY WE URGE YOU TO PLAY THIS SHOOTER



IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** TAITO
» **DEVELOPER:** TOAPLAN
» **FEATURED HARDWARE:** ARCADE
» **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP
» **RELEASED:** 1987
» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £150-£200

Toaplan's *Flying Shark* was probably a real looker back in its day, but in a genre now boasting the exhaustive delights of *Giga Wing 2*, the superlative *Under Defeat* and even Toaplan's very own *Batsugun*, this top-down shooter is now starting to look a little long in the tooth. Pop her bonnet and take her for a spin, though, and you'll discover that she still holds something really rather special, and if you're a shmup fan and haven't played this game before, we encourage you to take the time to discover it. You won't regret it.

Inspired chiefly by Capcom's classic *1942* – they share many similarities, and not just in the looks department – *Flying Shark* makes no secret about being derivative. With its nicely detailed but garish palettes of bright hues, and enemies that are all typical of what you'd expect to see in a top-down warfare blaster – varied coloured planes and gunships, tanks, and the occasional wildly proportioned plane that appears from the bottom of the screen and takes an annoying number of hits to fell – the game certainly looks like a case of 'seen it all before'. And, to be brutally honest, that's exactly what it is. However, in terms of offering a pure and tense hard-as-nails shooter – and there's likely to be people out there who would disagree with us here – you'd be hard-pressed to find a better example of the genre, in our opinion. *Flying Shark* contains all of the core ingredients that make the shmup genre so utterly addictive and brings them together brilliantly. Playing as a colourful blue biplane, your mission is simply to battle against insurmountable odds to get your bullet-magnetic bird from one runway to the next, and that's basically the entire description of your mission. There's no back story, no fluff, no nonsense, and complementing its basic premise are graphics that are suitably functional, made up of chunky sprites that are easy to spot and circumvent – if they didn't fire bullets.

Flying Shark is incredibly challenging, though. Enemies come at you from all directions – ground, sea and air – and rarely are you given any respite; just a relentless stream of sprites to try to transform into explosions before they do the same to you. Another interesting feature is that enemy patterns never actually feel regimented, even though

WHAT MAKES IT UNIQUE



DEFORMABLE BUILDINGS
Watch out for enemy buildings. Some can be destroyed and inside you may find some sneakily hidden ground-based enemies.



POWER-UP SYSTEM
Flying Shark's power-ups are deceptively simple. Destroying squadrons of red planes raises the range of your gun.



VERY CHALLENGING
The game is challenging but not unfair. It will test the mettle of the most proficient shmup fans, and is definitely addictive.



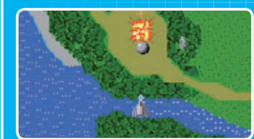
DISTILLED SHMUP BRILLIANCE
This is pure shmup action at its best. If you're a fan of top-down shooters, especially ones with a historical theme, you should play this.

INFLUENCES

The games that influenced and have been influenced by **Flying Shark**



■ **1942**
Flying Shark **borrowed the war theme, the power-up system and the simplistic formula of Capcom's classic shooter.**

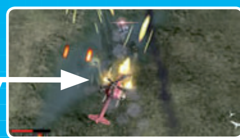


■ **XEVIOUS**
One of the earliest examples of the horizontal shooter, *Xevious* featured ground and air targets like *Flying Shark*.

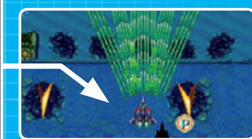


■ **TIGER HELI**
Another shmup by Toaplan and published by Taito, and clearly an influence with its similar-looking enemy sprites.





■ **UNDER DEFEAT**
A fresh and inspired take on the WWII blaster, G.rev's popular *Under Defeat* employs a simplistic combat system similar to *Flying Shark*.



■ **BATSUGUN**
A fantastic shmup by Toaplan, and its final release before some staff went off to form Cave. *Flying Shark*'s pilot, Schneider, also cameos in the game.



■ **PREHISTORIC ISLE IN 1930**
Okay, we know it's a horizontal shooter, but it is another great shoot-'em-up where you get to pilot a colourful biplane.

"Flying Shark makes no secret about being derivative"

they obviously are, and enemy bullets are often incredibly accurate – this is chiefly down to the fast speed at which they come at you – but not impossible to avoid. Often you and your plane will meet your makers courtesy of a well-timed enemy projectile, rather than unfairly getting shepherded into a corner, leaving you with no recourse. Also, most enemy weapons can be disabled, allowing you to prioritise attacks and influence the number of bullets flying around the screen instead of destroying them quickly.

Another interesting factor is that some of the levels in the game are primed with deformable environments, which can prove a real hindrance if the player isn't careful. Blow the roof off an enemy structure protected by gun emplacements, for example, and inside could be a batch of enemy tanks poised to blow you out of the sky. It's a quirky aspect to the game as it forces the player to break away from shooting from the hip and time their shots to ensure they meet their targets.

With so much to look out for, you'd expect Toaplan to have gifted the player with all manner of impressive firepower to make light work of the intercepting enemy squadrons. Well, you'd be wrong. Like everything in *Flying Shark*, the power-ups are incredibly simple. Like *1942*, instead of a variety of different gun types, the power-ups in the game will exponentially raise the spread of your plane's main gun. Now while that might sound a little lazy, given how much is thrown at you, in practice it actually helps you focus your attentions more on the job at hand. Simply put, whenever you see a power-up you never need to spare a thought to whether you should pick it up. For those particularly hairy moments, however, when you lose your rhythm and you find yourself on the back foot, thankfully you can call upon a special attack that is fired like a smart bomb and has a modest blast radius. While it doesn't clear the screen entirely of enemies, anything caught in its wake, including those pesky bullets, is generally destroyed.

If you're a fan of the genre, then you should really take the time to play *Flying Shark*. While it might not have a lot of elements that seasoned shmup fans thirst for, those looking for a pure, distilled and challenging example of the genre will find no better game.

THE CONVERSIONS

How the various versions compare



1 SPECTRUM

BEST VERSION

This is a surprisingly faithful conversion. It looks great, the attack patterns are true to the original, the gameplay is smooth and the special attack clears the entire screen, unlike the arcade version. Our only minor gripe is that the lack of colour makes avoiding bullets tricky.



2 COMMODORE 64

This is another solid and faithful conversion. While it certainly benefits from colour, overall it isn't as playable as the Spectrum port. But it does have better sound. It also comes with one of the weirdest and most confusing methods of displaying your score we've ever encountered in a game.



3 NES

It may have a different name (*Sky Shark*), but this is nevertheless a pretty decent conversion of the arcade original. There's a fair amount of flicker and the sound and visuals are rather ropey, but the gameplay is nice and tight and it runs along at a nice speed as well. A solid enough port that will please fans of the arcade original.



4 CPC

Despite being more colourful than the Spectrum version, this suffers from invisible bullet syndrome, awful sound and a sickly colour scheme. The worst thing about this conversion, however, is the cripplingly slow pace that it runs at, meaning it's about as exciting as waiting for the bus.

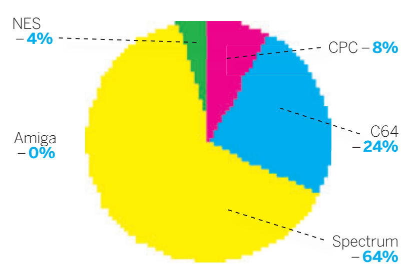


5 AMIGA

WORST VERSION

Considering that it's the most powerful machine, this Amiga conversion is really disappointing, mainly because it's a simple port of the Atari ST offering. Graftgold wasn't on conversion duties here and it shows. It kind of looks like the arcade game, but the slow pace kills it.

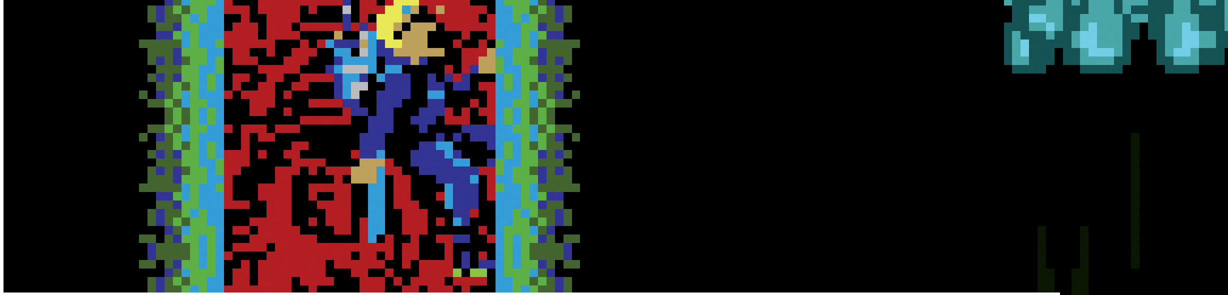
FORUM OPINION



"The Spectrum version is outstanding, one of the best shooters for it" **– C=Style**

"The NES gets my vote. It's nice and playable, very fast and has a good soundtrack" **– CrookedMouth**

"Spectrum version by miles. The C64 version plays like crap" **– Storm_Maker**

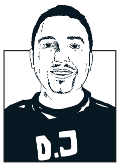


TODD'S ADVENTURES IN SLIME WORLD

ONE OF THE LYNX'S UNSUNG CLASSICS



- **PUBLISHER:** ATARI
- **RELEASED:** 1990
- **GENRE:** ADVENTURE
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** ATARI LYNX
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £5+



HISTORY

Even now, some 19 years after I first encountered it, I'm still impressed by the sheer scope and inventiveness of Peter Engelbrite's excellent Lynx game.

Sure, I was never able to experience the joys of adventuring into *Slime World* with seven other friends – I only knew two other people with Lynxes back in the day – but I was always in awe of the size of *Slime World*'s huge stages.

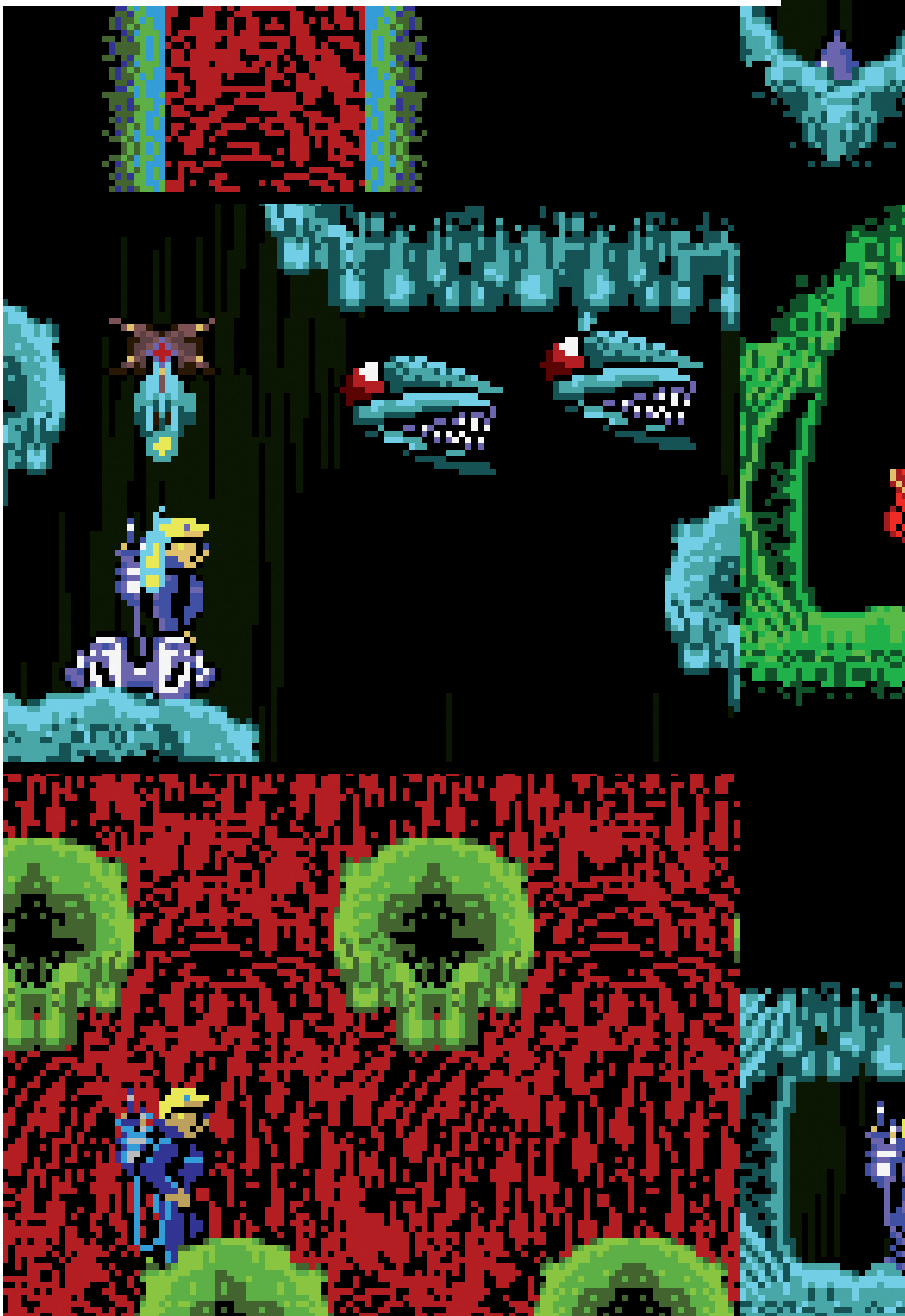
Fuelled by your quest to seek out precious Slime Crystals, you'd encounter all manner of icky foes that would slowly coat you in slime. Get covered too much and you'll die a sticky, disgusting death, so be sure to wash yourself in the pools of clear water that are judiciously scattered around the immense caverns.

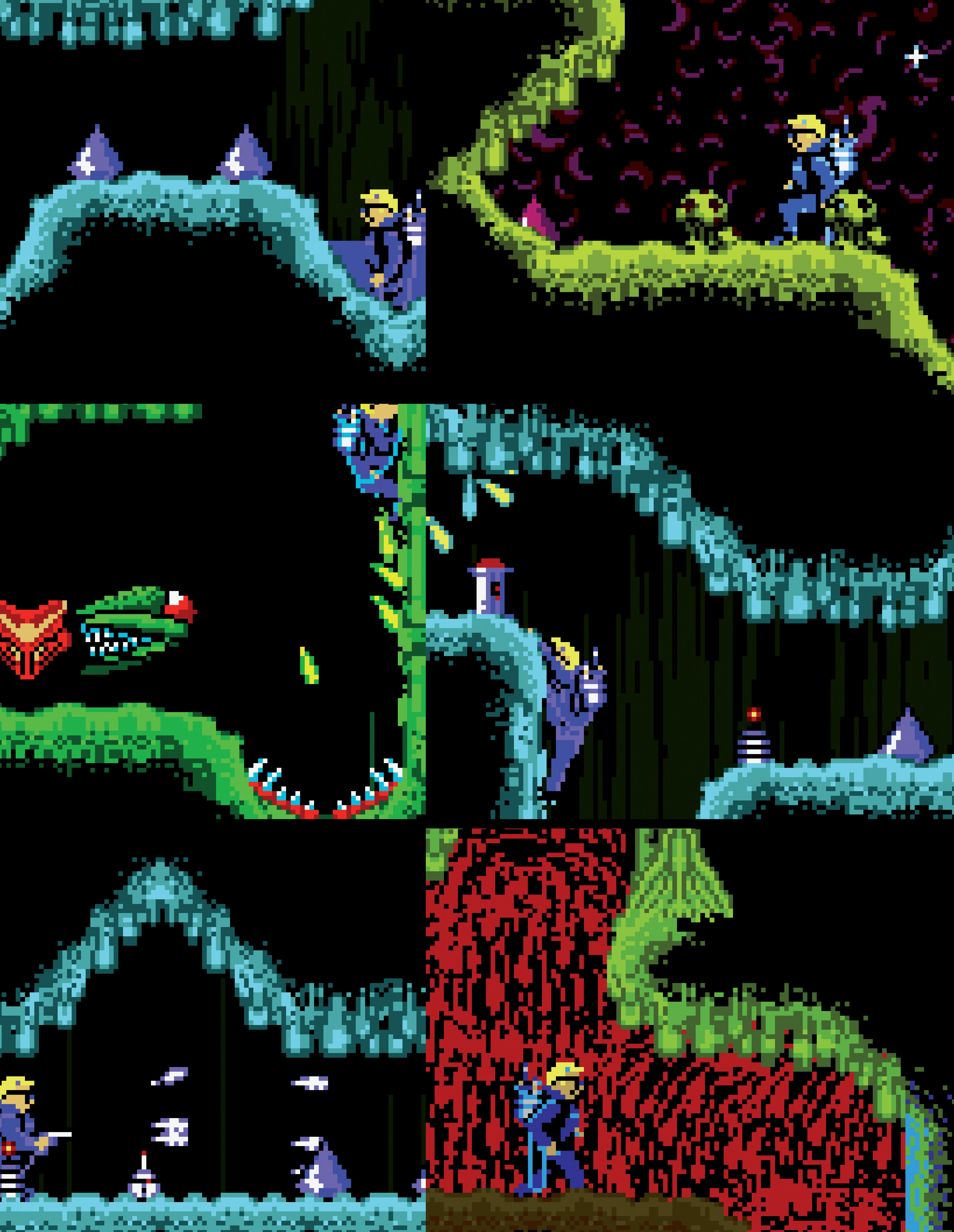
With six scenarios ranging from simply reaching the exit to locating your crashed spaceship, you'll certainly have your work cut out if you ever plan to finish the game, and Engelbrite's clever level design and deviously placed enemies mean that it's going to take many hours to complete. *Slime World* is filled with secrets, many of which can only be reached by climbing, crawling or using a jetpack, and while it's not quite up to the standards of *Metroid*, both games share many similarities.

Like many adventure games, there are a host of items to collect, including weapons and a backpack. Collecting these gives you an incentive to explore the environments, and it becomes even better when you're exploring with friends.

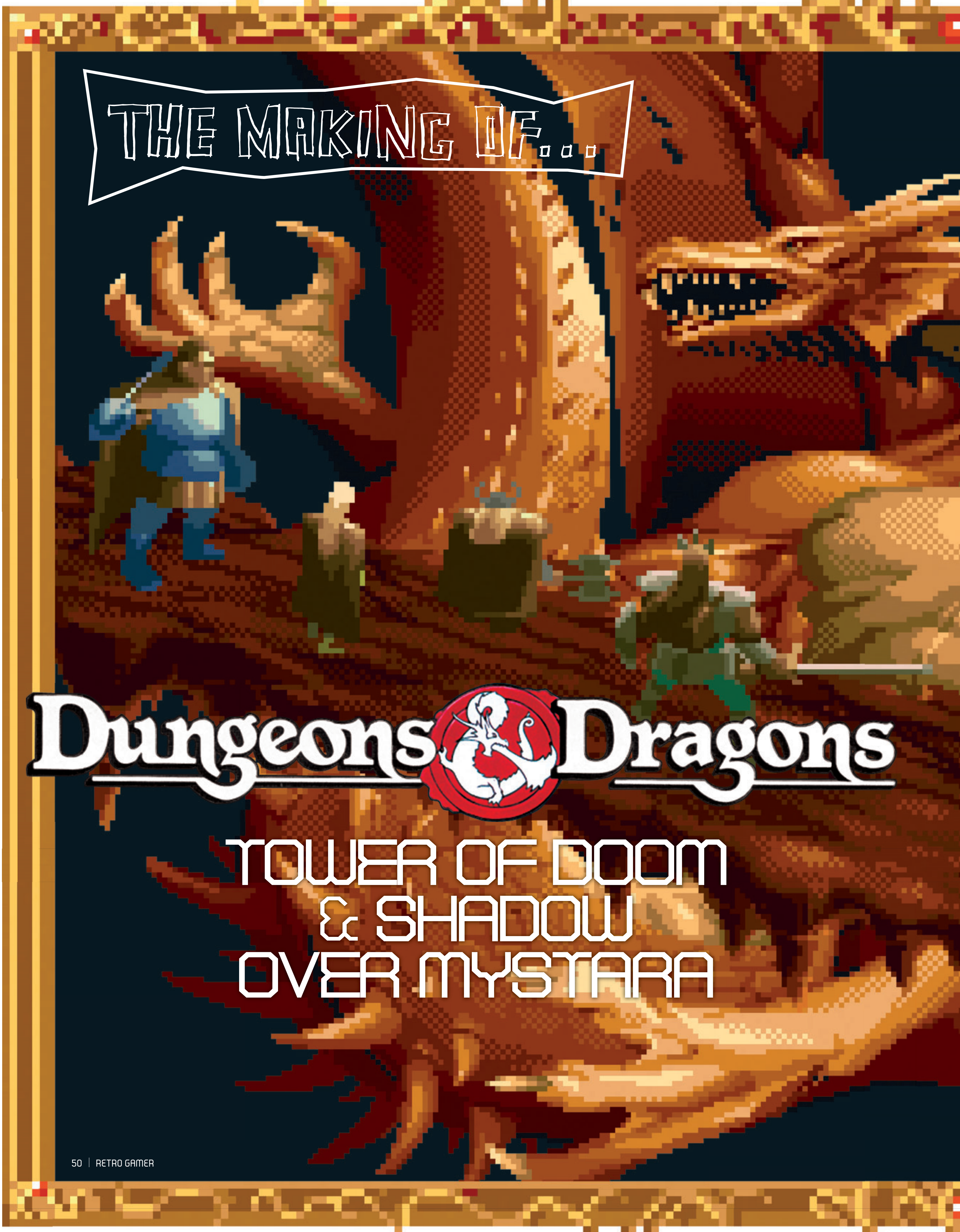
For all its greatness as a single-player experience, *Slime World* is just as captivating when played with other players, mainly because of the excellent modes that are included that range from seeking out more crystals than your opponent to simply trying to slime each other to death.

Although it's also available on Sega's Mega Drive, it's the Lynx version I constantly return to, and I urge everyone to do the same. It really is fantastic.





THE MAKING OF...



Dungeons & Dragons

TOWER OF DOOM & SHADOW OVER MYSTARA



Hey, waiter! You got some RPG in my beat-'em-up! Join Damien McFerran as he dons his favourite pair of chainmail socks and explores the history of two of Capcom's most unlikely coin-op triumphs

The fantasy role-playing series *Dungeons & Dragons* has enjoyed a long and fruitful relationship with the pastime of videogaming. We've seen countless digital interpretations of the tabletop war game, each one utilising the staggering scope of the licence to create new and amazing worlds for the player to explore. Yet the vast majority of these titles have remained firmly rooted in the realms of the videogame RPG, which isn't a terrific surprise when you consider that the genre was directly inspired by the pen-and-paper universe that *D&D* inhabits. However, throughout the past few decades, there have been some notable exceptions, with the most striking being Capcom's duo of 2D arcade titles – *Tower Of Doom* and *Shadow Over Mystara* – which were released in the mid-Nineties.

Capcom acquired the licence to create *D&D* titles at the start of the decade and, as part of the deal, the company ported Westwood Studios' *Eye Of The Beholder* to the Super NES. However, this was merely a taster for what was to come; Capcom wanted to use this most prestigious of Western licences in a manner that had never been seen before. Initially, though, things didn't exactly go according to plan, and it took the influence of Alex Jimenez to get the ball rolling. Jimenez – himself a self-confessed *D&D* addict – found that his path into videogame development was anything but straightforward.

"I got my entry into the industry by the great forces of the universe: happenstance and dumb luck," he says with a grin. "Capcom was having difficulty getting product approval from TSR, which was the company that controlled and published *D&D*. Capcom Japan had turned to its US branch to try and work something out with TSR, with SSI mediating – SSI was the holder of the videogame licence and had subbed it out to us for an arcade game. The problem was that most of the USA staff consisted of sales and manufacturing folks who didn't play *D&D*. Enter one of the lesser-sung heroes of the videogame world: a guy named James Goddard. He complained to a female friend of his – who was a friend of mine as well – about the difficulties they were having and how he needed help in general. She referred him to me, as she knew I played a lot of *D&D* and she thought I could be helpful in demonstrating the basic concepts of the game. So they brought me on as 'special consultant' and as an assistant to James."

Scooped from his tabletop battleground to Capcom's US headquarters, Jimenez quickly settled into his new role. "My duties were to research how *D&D* could be better explained to the Japanese, coming up with concept ideas, assisting in the testing of new games and gathering data from field-tested arcade games," he remembers. "From that humble beginning, the duties kind of grew and expanded. Having never worked on a videogame, I wrote what was basically a module adventure; something I would have – and, in fact, did – put my regular players through, and presented it. After a few meetings with TSR and SSI, I was given the job of writing and designing what would become *Dungeons & Dragons: Tower Of Doom*."

» *The King Of Dragons* is seen as the forerunner for the two *D&D* arcade titles.

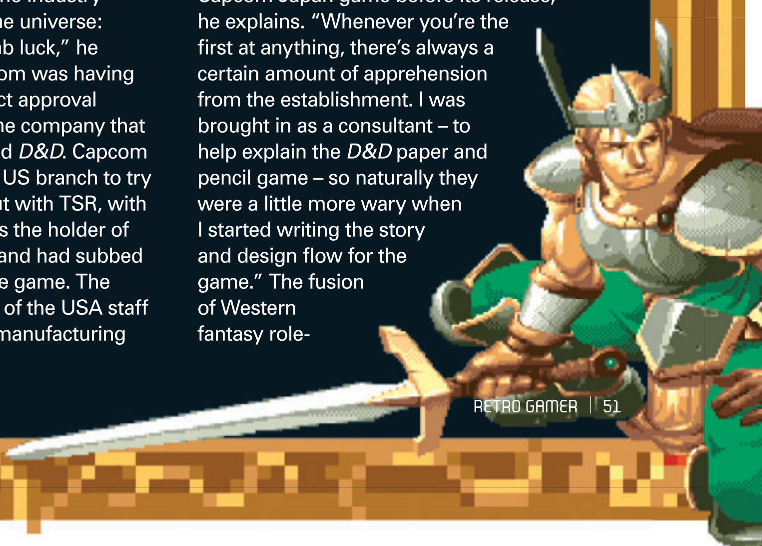


Although it wasn't immediately apparent to him at the time, Jimenez was breaking new ground. "James Goddard and I were the first Americans to have serious design input on a Capcom Japan game before its release," he explains. "Whenever you're the first at anything, there's always a certain amount of apprehension from the establishment. I was brought in as a consultant – to help explain the *D&D* paper and pencil game – so naturally they were a little more wary when I started writing the story and design flow for the game." The fusion of Western fantasy role-

IN THE KNOW

- **» PUBLISHER:** CAPCOM
- **» DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- **» PLATFORM:** ARCADE, SATURN, PC CD-ROM
- **» RELEASED:** 1993 (TOWER OF DOOM), 1996 (SHADOW OVER MYSTARA)
- **» GENRE:** SCROLLING FIGHTER
- **» EXPECT TO PAY:** £50+ (SATURN VERSION)





THE MAKING OF...

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS



Best Brawlers



THE KING OF DRAGONS (1991)
Considered by many to be the spiritual predecessor to the *D&D* titles, *The King Of Dragons* also takes place in a fantasy world populated by all kinds of monsters. Like *D&D*, it lacks any grapple moves, instead relying on magical attacks to give the gameplay depth.



KNIGHTS OF THE ROUND (1991)
Knights Of The Round – presumably Capcom didn't have room to fit 'Table' in the title – is a loose interpretation of the Arthurian legend and boasts an innovative levelling system where each character's appearance alters.



FINAL FIGHT (1989)
Surely Capcom's most influential side-scrolling fighter, this seminal game has been imitated countless times and remains one of videogaming's most enduring titles. While the gameplay is limited in terms of depth, *Final Fight* never fails to entertain, even today.



CAPTAIN COMMANDO (1991)
Although it was released in the same year as *The King Of Dragons* and *Knights Of The Round*, this futuristic beat-'em-up outclassed both in terms of originality and gameplay. The main character was once seen as a mascot for the company.



THE PUNISHER (1993)
A forgotten gem in Capcom's back catalogue, this licensed brawler is bursting with character and is extremely enjoyable. One particularly neat – if a little morbid – touch is the doctor attempting to resuscitate the main character on the 'Continue' screen.

playing and Japanese design sensibility unsurprisingly resulted in some friction, at least initially.

"There were some major differences in opinion on what the game would be like," recalls Jimenez. "Capcom felt it should be more Asian in flavour, styled more like the anime series *Record Of Lodoss War*, and many of the early character designs reflected this. On the other hand, TSR wanted it to reflect a more traditional Western *D&D* game, and I was caught right in the middle! But a little diplomacy – and a lot of fast-talking – goes a long way; over time we got over the mutual wariness and began to work as a cohesive team. It took a bit of effort, but we got there. The language barrier was formidable, but fortunately we had plenty of excellent help in that department."

While pretty much every *D&D* title up to this point had slavishly adhered to the tried-and-tested RPG template, Capcom's title would dare to be different. Calling upon the developer's considerable experience in the field of side-scrolling 2D brawlers, the powers that be decided to give the *D&D* world a metaphorical kick up the backside. However, as Jimenez reveals, ideas came from outside the company, too. "My personal inspirations came from Sega's *Golden Axe*, which I loved, and an old LaserDisc game called *Thayer's Quest*, which to my knowledge was the first coin-op to use an inventory system," he explains. "*Thayer's Quest* also used the multiple path system that I adopted into the *D&D* games."

Common sense might dictate that your typical *D&D* player isn't likely to be an arcade-going beat-'em-up enthusiast, but as Jimenez explains, getting existing fans on board wasn't necessarily the objective. "During the entire development of *D&D* we had one goal: to reproduce as closely as possible the experience of playing *D&D*," he says. "I wanted people who played *D&D* and people who never had. I wanted both groups to walk away from the game thinking that they had played not just an arcade game but an actual game of *D&D*."

Even though *Tower Of Doom* was clearly a step down in terms of complexity when compared to a legitimate tabletop game of *D&D*, with its pen, paper, multi-sided dice and weighty rule book, it nevertheless contained far more depth than contemporary fighters, such as *Final Fight* or even Capcom's similarly themed *King Of Dragons* – despite the lack of any grapple or throwing moves. Such intricacy caused several headaches for the design team. "The biggest problems were how to explain the different strengths of the character classes and the concept of an inventory system," says Jimenez. "I remember the latter



"I wanted players to walk away from the game thinking that they had played an actual game of D&D"

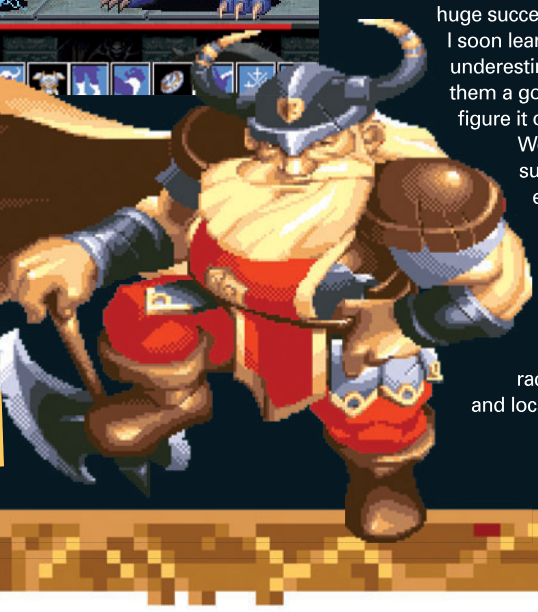


» [Arcade] (*Shadow Over Mystara*) During your quest you had the option to purchase items from inappropriately dressed shopkeepers.





» Japanese guide books attempted to explain the complex and often baffling world of *D&D* via colourful cartoons.



being a big problem. Using it would make the game much more complicated than was originally intended; *Tower Of Doom* was supposed to be a two-button joystick game. With an inventory system you had to add two more buttons for 'select' and 'use'. In the arcade world, more buttons means higher per unit cost and it also makes the game harder to sell as a conversion, since owners would have to drill in extra holes in their machines to accommodate the game. We spent a lot of time arguing about this, but in the end we finally convinced them it would make the game much better." It also meant that *Tower Of Doom* would require far more dedication on behalf of the player than your average side-scrolling fighter, but this didn't faze Jimenez. "I remember being told that *Street Fighter II* was originally rejected because they thought having six buttons would be too much for a player to learn," he states. "'When you add in all the combos and special moves, the average player would never go for it,' they said. Yet *Street Fighter II* was a huge success. An important rule I soon learned was to never underestimate your player; give them a good game and they'll figure it out."

Working with a licence such as *D&D* is both exciting and at the same time incredibly restrictive: while you have an entire pre-fabricated world to play around with, including multiple races, spells, monsters and locations, you have to ensure that you don't abuse the subject matter or create any situations that might be paradoxical or out of place. This was a tough balance to maintain, even for a hardcore *D&D* fan such as Jimenez. "I had free rein to do whatever I wanted provided I stayed in the defined areas of the *D&D* world," he states. "Even then, there were certain areas they wanted me to avoid, such as the Elven kingdom – they had plans for that at the time. Beyond that, the sky was the limit. TSR and SSI were great; they sent me so much material. The *D&D* world was so rich back then, so writing the storyline was the easy part. Getting that story approved by both Capcom and TSR was another matter entirely." Indeed, getting his Japanese colleges to grasp certain elements of the *D&D* world wasn't easy. "They had more difficulty with the setting than in any of the game concepts," Jimenez comments. "There was a Japanese printing of *Advanced D&D* but not basic *D&D*, which is what we were working with. None of the really superb Mystara game materials – which was the campaign in which the Capcom titles would take place – were printed in Japanese. Mystara was such a large world with so many settings; it was hard for me to keep the adventure contained in so few lands and it was hard for Capcom's designers to not want to introduce their own flavour into these already established domains. For example, one level takes place on a ship at sea, with the players battling creatures on the decks. Capcom Japan thought it would be cool if the ship was a side-paddle steamer, something that does not exist in the main *D&D* world. They thought it looked cool and they

More D&D

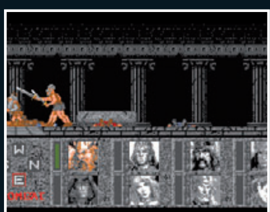
HEROES OF THE LANCE (1988, VARIOUS FORMATS)
One of the first *D&D* games to adopt a more action-oriented gameplay style, this side-scrolling fighter featured stunning visuals and gorgeous sound, but sadly the quest itself was a little underwhelming. Taito's *Cadash* – released the following year – owes a great debt to *Heroes Of The Lance*.

WARRIORS OF THE ETERNAL SUN (1992, MEGA DRIVE)
One of the few console-exclusive *D&D* entries, this top-down RPG was created by Westwood Associates, which would later become Westwood Studios. Although the visuals are a little washed out, there's a staggering amount of challenge here and the game is well worth a look.

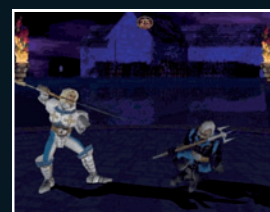
EYE OF THE BEHOLDER (1990, VARIOUS FORMATS)
Another Westwood production, *Eye Of The Beholder* took the first-person viewpoint popularised by FTL's seminal *Dungeon Master* and gave it a typically enticing *D&D* lick of paint. The result is one of the most beloved fantasy RPGs of the Nineties. Capcom handled the SNES port.

BALDUR'S GATE (1993, PC)
Often cited as the game that resurrected the ailing RPG genre, which was struggling to remain relevant in the late Nineties, *Baldur's Gate* eventually sold over 2 million copies. Developer BioWare is now a household name and has gone on to produce notable titles such as *Mass Effect* and *Star Wars: The Old Republic*.

IRON & BLOOD: WARRIORS OF RAVENLOFT (1996, PLAYSTATION)
While Capcom's *D&D* fighters melded two different genres, not all crossover attempts were as triumphant. *Iron & Blood* attempted to give fans their own version of *Tekken*, but the hopeless visuals, stodgy controls and clumsy gameplay put paid to any chance it had.







wanted me to persuade TSR to go along with it. Well when TSR said no, boy did they mean no, and I'd worked with them enough to know when they said it, they meant it. But Capcom wouldn't take no for an answer – they kept pushing to get it in and just could not understand why they couldn't have it. I kept trying to explain that TSR was not trying to be difficult – it was just that a paddle steamer didn't fit into a medieval European fantasy setting, yet they kept telling me how cool it would look. The concept of anachronism was something they could not grasp. I finally told them that they had to yield to the wishes of the licensor or the game would not be approved. There were a few smouldering feelings and quite a few bruised egos, but they finally gave in."

Given the tantrums, tears and toil expended over the production of *Tower Of Doom*, there was understandably a fair degree of trepidation prior to its release. This was a brave new way of representing the beloved *D&D* universe and was the first title based on the licence to be produced by a Japanese company; there was a very real danger that fans would hate it and traditional arcade-goers would perceive it as being too geeky. However, such feelings of unease were largely unwarranted, as the first public exhibition of the game proved. "We did the sneak preview at Gen Con, an annual gaming convention that was started by *D&D* founder Gary Gygax," recalls Jimenez. "TSR used to have a huge castle that dominated the floor, and that year Capcom was given prime space in the castle. Soon we had a huge crowd at the game and they were very excited. I was discreetly monitoring and listening to the crowd for their reactions, when suddenly the players got into an argument over who should get what treasure. Just then one of the guys in the crowd, who didn't know who I was, leaned over to me and said, 'Man, whoever made this knew how to capture the essence of a *D&D* session!' I take that as the highest compliment I've ever received!"

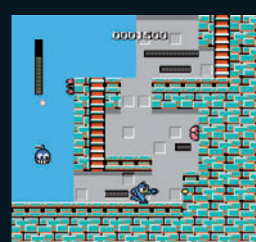
Tower Of Doom was eventually released in 1993 and went on to become a modest success for Capcom. Granted, it wasn't in the same league as the insanely lucrative *Street Fighter II* or *Final Fight*, but arcade owners found that the machine produced steady profits thanks to its deep mechanics and branching pathways. It was a truly unique coin-op – one that rewarded repeat play and kept players interested. Taking this into account – as well as the fact that Capcom wished to make as much of the *D&D* licence as possible – it's unsurprising to discover that a sequel was in development before a single coin had been inserted into a *Tower Of Doom* machine. "Work began on *Shadow Over Mystara* almost immediately and took about 16 months, compared to *Tower Of Doom*'s 20," reveals Jimenez. "We had a pretty clear

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

STREET FIGHTER II
SYSTEM: VARIOUS
YEAR: 1991

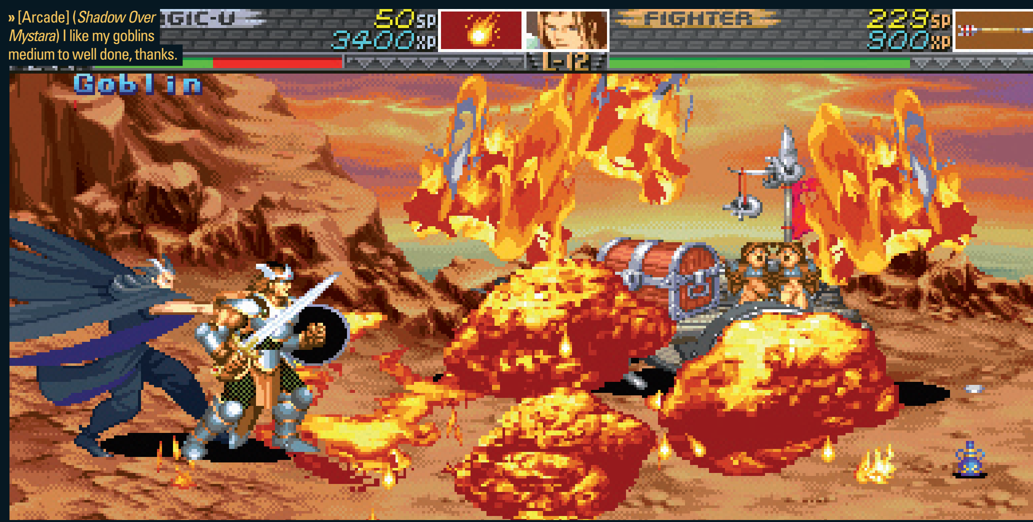
RESIDENT EVIL
SYSTEM: PLAYSTATION, SATURN, PC
YEAR: 1996

MEGA MAN (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: NES
YEAR: 1987









» [Arcade] (*Shadow Over Mystara*) I like my goblins medium to well done, thanks.

idea about the mechanics so it was just a matter of getting new art and story. Things went remarkably smoothly; we got the story approved on the first pass from TSR. To this day I have that approval framed, just to prove it really happened." The 1996 sequel allowed Capcom to fix some of the problems that existed in the first title – the most pressing being a lack of characters. The svelte Thief and punk rocker-style Magic User were drafted in, further expanding the variety offered to players. However, a lot of work went into aspects of the game that weren't quite as immediately apparent. As well as retaining the branching paths, the game contained a staggering number of possible endings.

"Each character had four separate endings, except the dwarf, who had three," says Jimenez. "Each ending was based on how much experience a player had earned over the course of the game. The amount would also vary based on the level of difficulty the operator set the game for. Basically it translated as the more cash you earned, the happier your ending – a little shallow, perhaps, but this was *D&D*, after all."

Other elements were added that lent the game an even stronger RPG feel, such as the presence of ultra-rare items, including the legendary Staff of Wizardry. "The staff gave a damage bonus to your spells but would only work for Magic Users," explains Jimenez. "It also allowed for the famous 'Retribution Strike', where a wizard breaks his staff, releasing all its energy in one massive blow. However, the conditions needed to pull this off were difficult to say the least. There were other magic items that were going to be included in the game but were cut because of development time and space limitations on the cartridge."

Capcom's two *D&D* games have gone on to become cult classics, revered by countless gamers. Jimenez enjoyed a fruitful career at Capcom, assisting in the production of some of the firm's greatest 2D titles, and although he's now occupying the lofty position of design director at Taiwan-based Seed Studio, these two early projects hold a special place in his heart.

"To know that I helped create something that so many people have enjoyed has filled me with a great deal of personal pride," he says. "With the possible exception of *Marvel Super Heroes*, I consider the *D&D* titles to be the greatest games I've ever worked on, even after 18 years in the industry. The fact that people still play and enjoy them never ceases to amaze and delight me. When people come up and thank me for making a game they liked I always turn it around and thank them. As a game developer, my job is to entertain; to please the players. When they tell me that I've done that, those are the days I go home with a smile on my face."

Capcom's 2D fighters are sadly part of a bygone era, and the company is now firmly entrenched in the world of 3D. However, given the existence of titles such as *Odin Sphere* and *Muramasa: The Demon Blade* – both courtesy of George Kamitani, who also worked on the Capcom *D&D* titles – does Jimenez think there's any chance that someone might release a spiritual sequel? "Technology today has rendered what we did those years ago as 'quaint', and yet games like *Castle Crashers* on XBLA show the continuing popularity for the 2D side-scroller," he replies. "I think there will always be a demand for these types of games; whether that demand is based on love of the style, the simplicity of play or just plain nostalgia, I'm not sure. I doubt that *D&D* will ever be done as a side-scrolling brawler again. The licensing requirements have gotten much more complicated and the corporations that control them tend to look forward to the next hot trend rather than look back to what they consider the distant past. The tabletop game itself has changed considerably since I worked on it; I think trying to adapt it today would be extremely difficult. That said, I remember being told that it would be impossible to make *D&D* into an arcade game…"



» [Arcade] (*Tower of Doom*) This boss can be tricky to beat until you realise his shadowy secret.



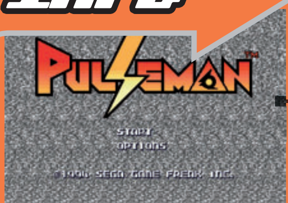


» [Arcade] (*Tower of Doom*) Fireballs are an effective way of tacking down multiple enemies. It looks nice too.

Special thanks go to www.fantasyanime.com for their help in creating this feature

IMPORT ONLY

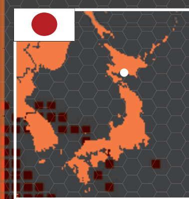
INFO



» **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
» **DEVELOPER:** GAME FREAK
» **FEATURED HARDWARE:** MEGA DRIVE
» **ALSO ON:** VIRTUAL CONSOLE
» **GENRE:** PLATFORM
» **RELEASED:** 1994
» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £20-40

» **CO-ORDINATES:** 35°41′ N 139°46′ E

GAME ORIGIN

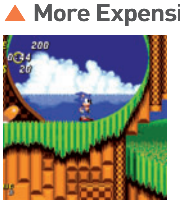


» **COUNTRY:** JAPAN
» **POPULATION:** 127,433,494
» **CAPITAL:** TOKYO
» **NATIONAL LANGUAGE:** JAPANESE
» **CURRENCY:** YEN
» **TIME ZONE:** GMT +9

PRICE WATCH

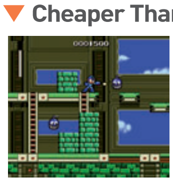
» **Similar titles to splash cash on**

▲ More Expensive Than



SONIC 2
GET IT FOR: **£3+**
The best platformer on the Mega Drive and you can pick it up for pennies. Sonic's second 16-bit outing was a defining moment for the Blue Blur, adding a popular sidekick, a neat dash move and Super Sonic to the canon.

▼ Cheaper Than



MEGA MAN: THE WILY WARS
GET IT FOR: **£50+**
This compendium of the first three NES *Mega Man* titles, which boasts spruced up 16-bit visuals and a brand new *Mega Man* game, fetches ridiculous sums of money these days.

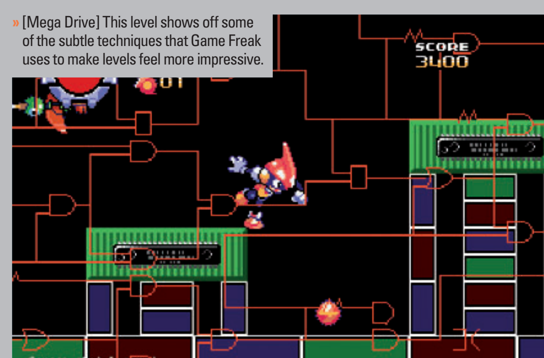
PULSEMAN

» From the fertile minds that brought us Pokémon came Pulseman: not only one of the best Mega Drive titles to never leave Japan, but also one of the most electrifying platform heroes to appear on the console. That's the only electricity pun in this entire feature, honest

It's likely that you've never heard of *Pulseman*. The game was released relatively late in the Mega Drive's life, and was only released officially in Japan despite the 16-bit era marking a bit of a renaissance period for the platform genre. It's a shame, too, as this lavish-looking offering by Game Freak – the team that would go on to create *Pokémon* – and, most notably, *Pokémon* designer Ken Sugimori, was one of the better platform games to come out of that epoch, in our opinion, and is widely regarded as a masterpiece in game design.

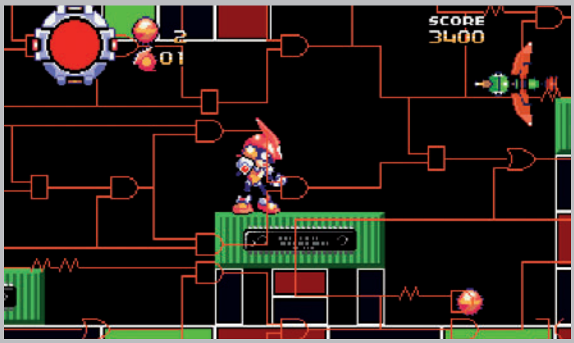
A mixture of *Sonic* and *Mega Man*, but with a strong pang of *Rocket Knight Adventures*, *Pulseman* was a glorious-looking platform game that may have felt like a mixture of other platform games you've played before, but it brought these pilfered ingredients to the boil with an impressive amount of care and attention, making it a bit of an undiscovered classic for the Mega Drive.

In the game you play as a Pulseman: a half-robot half-human boy who is the result of his scientist dad creating artificial life and then copping off with one of his creations. It's a weird back story, and one that, for legal reasons, we have to leave right there, but from this odd union of man and machine, Earth gets itself a new platform game hero who can harness electricity – a power that Game Freak would later give to Pikachu – and travel freely between the electronic and real world. However, when prolonged exposure to the digital world changes Pulesman's dad into a crazed scientist, and he embarks on a bit of global cyber-terrorism, it falls to Pulseman to put an end to the evildoer's… uh… evildoing.



» [Mega Drive] This level shows off some of the subtle techniques that Game Freak uses to make levels feel more impressive.

Split across six sizeable stages, glued together by a variety of bonus levels, plus a final one to draw things to a nice close, *Pulseman* certainly holds a lot of longevity. And the fact that you're given a bit of freedom in what way you can attack the game means that even if you're



» [Mega Drive] As well as being wonderfully animated, Pulseman has a dizzying array of moves.



» [Mega Drive] *Pulseman* clearly borrows elements from other games, most notably *Mega Man*.



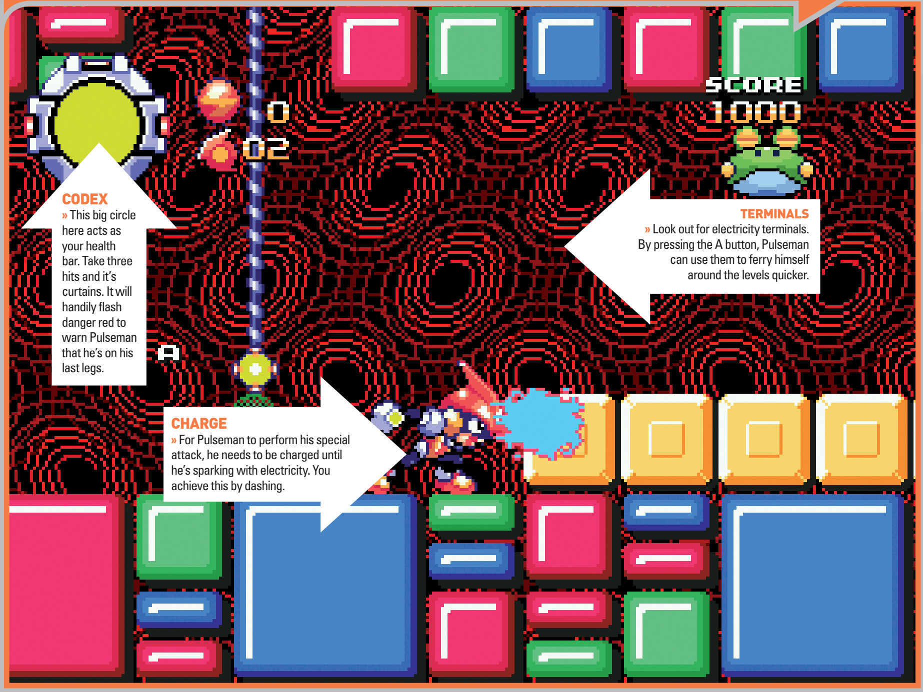
» [Mega Drive] Pulseman was the creation of *Pokémon* designer Ken Sugimori.



» [Mega Drive] The levels are the stars of *Pulseman*, with each feeling unique.

GO DEEPER

What to look for when playing Pulseman

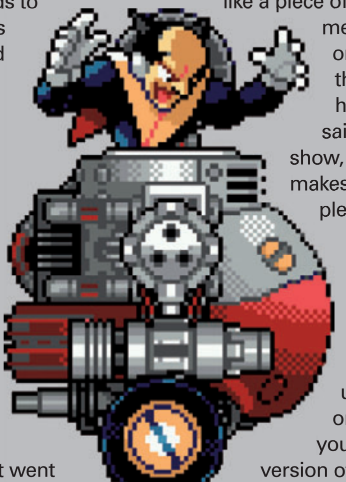


> **"Many who have actually played the game cite it as one of the best-looking Mega Drive games to ever find a release"**

WE SORTA KINDA AGREE WITH THAT PROCLAMATION

rubbish at it, you can still get to see a lot of the good stuff that *Pulseman* has to offer – another *Mega Man* parallel.

The levels in *Pulseman* are large and well-detailed, but oddly sparse and usually only containing a handful of enemies to circumvent. The challenge tends to come from helping Pulseman negotiate his way around the game's brilliantly designed worlds using his various powers. And this is another great element of the game. Pulseman boasts an impressive arsenal of moves, which includes a neat jump kick that destroys those annoying enemies lurking on overhead ledges – why can't all platform game heroes have a handy move like this? There's also a close-range electric slash attack, and a dash move that generates enough friction to allow him to morph into a concentrated ball of electricity and pinball around the screen a bit like Sparkster.



Also featuring sublime music courtesy of *Pokémon* composer Junichi Masuda, it's clear that a great deal of effort went into the game. In fact, many who have played *Pulseman* cite it as one of the best-looking Mega Drive games to find a release, and while we agree that the game certainly is a looker, if we had one criticism, it's that many of the enemy designs do feel a little bland and uninspired: a metal mouse, something that looks like a piece of moving metal grass, and a giant metal balloon of a cat's face firing oranges are just a few examples of the throwaway adversaries that Pulseman has to face in the game. But as we've said, the levels are the true stars of the show, as all have some quirky element that makes them both a joy to discover and a pleasure to negotiate.

Sadly *Pulseman* never found an official release outside Japan – it was available for a period on Sega's on-demand Genesis games service Sega Channel in the US, however – and, owing to its scarcity, copies usually fetch in the region of £20-40 on eBay. If you own a Wii, though, you can now pick up a regionalised version of the game on Virtual Console for 900 Points (around £6).



CAN'T IMPORT? YOU COULD TRY



ROCKET KNIGHT ADVENTURES

» Developed by Nobuya Nakazato of Konami, the man behind some of the best games in the *Contra* series, *Rocket Knight Adventures* was a neat mix of cutesy platformer and run-and-gunner interspersed with neat side-scrolling shooter sections.

a decade of FALLOUT

Retro Gamer invites you to a happy place of atomic radiation, vicious mutants and Mad Max-inspired fashion as Craig Ritchie tells the story of how a vision of Fifties America decimated by nuclear war single-handedly revived the computer RPG



Holl.





» [PC] NPCs who could join your party, as followers, were actually a last minute addition to the game.



» [PC] The SPECIAL, perks and skill systems allowed for incredible character customisation.

After a prosperous showing in the golden age of the late Eighties and early Nineties, the world of computer role-playing gaming sank into the shadows cast by the juggernaut that was 3D first-person shooters. The likes of *Doom* and *Duke Nukem 3D* dominated PC gaming and years went by with only a handful of noteworthy RPG titles, most either built on ageing or outdated engines, or simply turning out to be uninspired and derivative works of regurgitated Tolkienesque fantasy. Something had to be done to save this neglected and stagnating genre, and the good folk at Interplay were about to do just the thing.

It was 1996 and a small group of designers simply referred to as the 'RPG division' was getting under way on a new game. Despite lacking a definite direction and much structure or organised management, the project that would become *Fallout* was born.

It wasn't long before Interplay identified that the project needed more in the way of organisation, as eventual project leader Tim Cain recalls: "The original team was Tom Decker as producer and myself as programmer. We had no artists and designers assigned to the project, and Tom had 22 other projects at the time. He was massively overloaded with work, and at some point, the executive producer at Interplay asked me if I could act as the producer and programmer on *Fallout*, and since that meant it was just me working on the game, I said I could handle it. They called me a 'project leader', and from that point on, I programmed most of the time and went to the occasional producer meeting."

The considerable freedom as well as new position as head of a slowly growing group of developers allowed Cain and his team to take the project in whichever direction they saw fit. "There were so many fantasy RPGs on the market that I felt it was time for something different," he says. "I would host brainstorming sessions after normal work hours, where I would offer people free pizza if they would come and pitch ideas and listen to other people's ideas, and we would all critique each other. Lots of crazy ideas came out of those meetings, like time travel, alien abduction, dinosaur worlds, and even a *Truman Show*-style game where we were lying to the player about what was really going on."

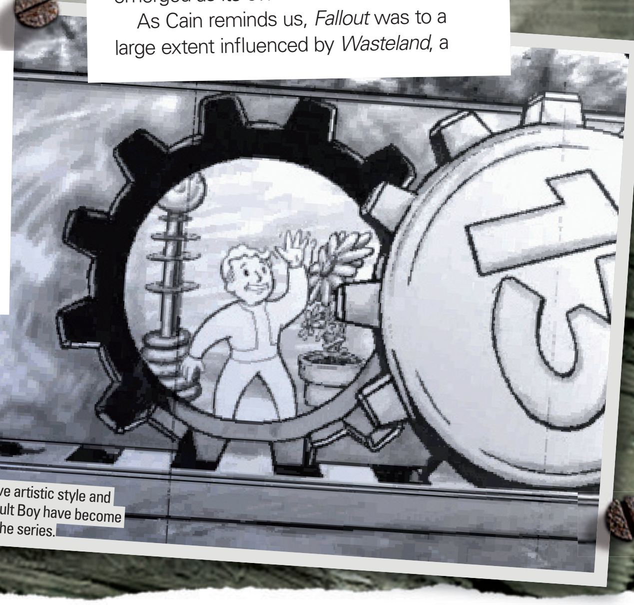
An artist named Leonard Boyarsky had been attending the sessions and became very eager to get more involved with *Fallout*. "I started as a grunt artist on *Stonekeep* and worked my way up to become one of the lead artists on the project," he explains. "Near the end of *Stonekeep*, I heard that Tim Cain was working on a new project based on GURPS [Generic Universal RolePlaying System] and he started meeting after work with anyone who wanted to come and talk about what the game should be. I started going to those meetings and somehow convinced Tim and my boss at the time that I should be the art director on Tim's new game. Suckers."

Like Cain and Jason Anderson, another artist who had joined the ranks as a chief designer on *Fallout*, Boyarsky also felt that a shift away from *Dungeons & Dragons*-style fantasy was well overdue. "Sword and sorcery was never a consideration for me," he says, "but it was considered for at least long enough for Tim and Jason Anderson to make the first guy walking around in the engine a knight. But it quickly became apparent in the after-hours meetings that we were all leaning towards science fiction. We were all over the place in those meetings, with aliens, time travel – any science fiction themes we could throw out were considered. It was great. We really felt like we could make anything we wanted to. To this day, I have no idea why Interplay gave us so much freedom to do whatever we wanted – a bunch of guys who had never been in charge of a game before. I don't know what was happening above us in management, but we were totally consumed in our own little *Fallout* world."

"As for the post-apocalyptic theme," Boyarsky continues, "I was a total geek about the *Mad Max* movies – well, maybe not the last one – and I really wanted to do a post-apocalyptic game. At the time, there weren't any around, and it seemed like it would be a great setting for an RPG. I don't remember how the actual decision was made to go post-apocalyptic. I'm sure back then I thought I had tremendous influence on the decision, which is a bit ridiculous in retrospect as Tim barely knew me yet. I do talk very loud, though, so maybe that had something to do with it."

"The post-apocalyptic idea was one everyone liked," recalls Cain, "and we even thought, naively, that we could get the rights to *Wasteland* and make a sequel to that. In the end, we didn't, but *Fallout* emerged as its own IP."

As Cain reminds us, *Fallout* was to a large extent influenced by *Wasteland*, a



» *Fallout*'s distinctive artistic style and happy-go-lucky Vault Boy have become synonymous with the series.

a decade of FALLOUT

Fallout A to Z



A is for Action Points: Accessing your inventory, moving around, reloading weapons and attacking all take time, and Action Points, determined by your Agility score, dictate how much your character can do each round of combat.

B is for Books: The primary source of knowledge in the wasteland, these precious tomes increase your character's proficiency in various skills. Notable titles include First Aid Manuals, Tumblers Today and, of course, the Big Book of Science.

C is for Chosen One: The Chosen One, protagonist of *Fallout 2*, is the grandchild of the first game's hero. Hailing from the small village of Arroyo, the Chosen One is tasked with retrieving the precious Garden of Eden Creation Kit.

D is for Dogmeat: Your best friend in the wasteland, Dogmeat has appeared in all three of the main *Fallout* games, albeit with the third being a distant descendant.

E is for Energy Weapons: Including laser pistols, plasma rifles, Gatling lasers and gauss rifles, these powerful weapons could slice an enemy in two or leave them as nothing more than a smoking pile of ash.

F is for Forced Evolutionary Virus: The unfortunate result of military experiments into finding an immunity to biological warfare through altering DNA, the FEV is largely responsible for most of the more extreme mutations in the wasteland, notably the Super Mutants.

G is for Gecko: These giant mutated lizards feature most prominently in *Fallout 2*, also lending their name to a pub and a town.

H is for Hubologist: *Fallout 2*'s religious crazies hailing from the shattered remains of San Francisco, and a somewhat more than inadvertent spoof of Scientology. For legal reasons, we're sure that the similarities are a coincidence.

I is for Iguana-on-a-stick: A trademark 'delicacy' from the wasteland. Just be careful of some of the fleshier iguana bits – ask Junktown's Doc Morbid if you want to know more.

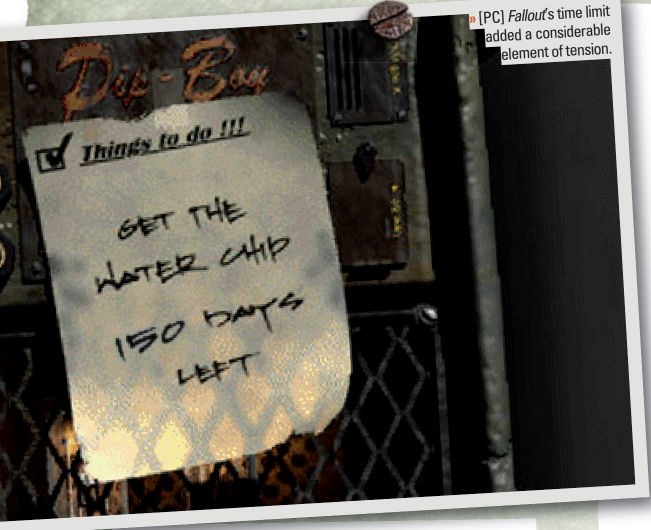
J is for Jane: The dual-pistol wielding, scantily clad and, uh, 'generously endowed' Raider Matron from *Fallout: Brotherhood Of Steel*.

K is for Karma: Linked to your reputation, Karma is the measurement of your good and bad actions and affects NPC reactions as well as which companions are willing to join up with you.

L is for Lyon's Pride: This is one of the most respected units in the Capital Wasteland faction of the Brotherhood of Steel and plays a prominent role in *Fallout 3*.

M is for Mole Rat: These mutated and overgrown rodents became abundant after the Great War. Generally violent, they are easily bested by experienced combatants. Hint: go for the eyes.

N is for Nuka-Cola: The wasteland's favourite soft drink, and a *Fallout* staple. Nuka-Cola



» [PC] *Fallout*'s time limit added a considerable element of tension.

1988 role-playing game from Interplay that shares more than a few common elements with its spiritual successor. In fact, those familiar with Interplay's earlier title may recognise such references as the Red Ryder BB gun, Far Go Traders and Dugan the Nuka-Cola addict: Red Ryder was a key character in *Wasteland*, while Brian Fargo and Bill Dugan were among the team that developed the game.

With a post-apocalyptic theme decided, art direction became the next major focus. "I've always loved the retro Forties/Fifties art style vibe," says Boyarsky, describing the graphical style that would go on to be one of the hallmarks of the *Fallout* series, "but I'm not sure what prompted the light bulb to go off in my head to make me think that a Fifties-style world was a perfect fit for a post-apocalyptic RPG. If I had to really pinpoint a source, it was probably Frank Miller and Geoff Darrow's ridiculously over the top *Hard Boiled* comic book, which had Fifties styling coupled with tons of ductwork and vents. We also looked at the movies *Brazil*, *The City Of Lost Children* and the original *Batman* a lot, as well as any other [period] material we could get our hands on. For some reason we also included some more 'modern' takes on science fiction in the mix as well, but those were probably off the mark a little bit."

Boyarsky's affinity for Fifties art as well as the post-apocalyptic setting tied in perfectly with the nuclear paranoia that had been so rampant at the time. The idea stuck, the direction was taken, and now that things were getting under way, the team had to settle on an RPG rule set that would underpin the game. Steve Jackson's popular GURPS was first choice, and the team licensed it for use on *Fallout*. "We had made the entire combat engine for the game using its rule set," says Cain, "but when contractual problems arose, we sat down and invented SPECIAL. We had about two weeks to create it, but luckily the graphics engine and the combat engine were created separately, so it was easy to remove one system and replace it with another. The acronym SPECIAL stands for the seven stats in the game, namely Strength, Perception, Endurance, Charisma, Intelligence, Agility and Luck. I originally had them ordered differently and was using the acronym ACELIPS, but luckily someone spotted a better ordering and history was changed!"

SPECIAL, together with a host of skills and perks, allowed *Fallout* to present a role-playing experience that was truly deep: this was not just role-playing in name, serving to squeeze the title into a genre where a specific class and a chosen alignment were the be-all and end-all of your character. Rather, *Fallout* allowed for genuine role-playing in a much more traditional sense, in that a character entirely focused on speech and charisma could get through almost all, if not the entirety, of the game just by talking his way through or out of situations that 99 per cent of other characters could only solve through violence. Those who have finished the original *Fallout* as a character with excellent speech skills will know what we are talking about, but for those who have not played the game yet, we won't spoil anything by giving away more details here. Similarly, thief-like characters, science specialists and straight-up gun nuts all had their own way through the game.

A direct effect of this was that *Fallout* gained an incredible degree of replayability, another feature that would go on to be one of the key characteristics of the series. Indeed, there was often a multitude of ways to complete certain quests or to get past specific obstacles based upon your character build. In one extreme example, there were nine distinct ways to get through the locked door to the rat-infested area of Trapper Town in *Fallout 2*.

And so, a story of large underground cities called Vaults, which served as protection from a large-scale nuclear war, began to take shape, with the overall premise being that the player's own Vault's Water Chip had malfunctioned late in the 23rd Century, almost 200 years after it was first sealed. It was up to him – or her, for that matter – to step out into the wasteland in search of a replacement. Were he to fail, everyone he had ever known would perish.





"To this day I have no idea why Interplay gave us so much freedom to do whatever we wanted"

and its big brother Nuka-Cola Quantum could boost stats or heal hit points when drunk, and the caps from their bottles became the legal tender of post-apocalyptic America.

O is for Overseer: Each Vault has as its leader one of these high-ranking, often with questionable judgement, Vault-Tec officials. Overseer Jacoren of Vault 13 sent the original Vault Dweller out to find the Water Chip.

P is for Paladin, Paradise Falls, Perception, Peoria, Perks, Pip-Boy, *Point Lookout*, Power Armor, Project Purity and Pilgrim's Landing: A special letter in the *Fallout* universe, P is.

Q is for Quincy: A small township that featured in *Fallout Tactics*, wherein one must rescue mayor Hillary Eastwood and her daughter from evil tribals known as the Beastlords.

R is for Rad Away: Best used in conjunction with the preventative Rad-X, this handy med helps remove some of that nasty radiation from your system, alleviating one of the major dangers of the wasteland. Remember: always consult your GP.

S is for SPECIAL: When Steve Jackson's GURPS rule set was no longer an option, SPECIAL became *Fallout*'s very own stats system.

T is for Temple of Trials: The Temple of Trials forms part of the initiation rite of the Chosen One, rewarding him or her with the coveted Vault jumpsuit upon completion. Serving as a kind of tutorial area, it ended up proving very unpopular with many players and is widely regarded as the worst part of *Fallout 2*.

U is for Unarmed: The ultimate in getting up close and personal, unarmed combat was doable, but with all those awesome guns on offer, it was ultimately a bit limited.

V is for Vault: Billed as the ideal family-friendly shelter from nuclear fallout, these massive underground structures were, in fact, part of a secret government experiment – is there any other kind of government experiment? A total of 122 Vaults were built across America, each housing around 1,000 people.

W is for Wasteland: The name of the barren, radiated, nuclear-bomb-obliterated landscape that was once the rich, green and lush United States of America. The status of the rest of the world is unknown.

X is for Xander Root: Together with the right ingredients, this wondrous root can be used to produce a number of healing items, which range from mild healing powders through to potent Super Stimpaks.

Y is for Yao Guai: These powerful mutated bears are big, fast and deadly, and consuming their meat can heal injuries as well as provide a damage bonus.

Z is for Zeta: A giant alien craft orbiting Earth, Mothership Zeta plays host to the final *Fallout 3* downloadable content.


» [PC] Sometimes the combat could be just plain cruel. Note the baby Radscorpion, obviously tipping the balance.


» [PC] "War. War never changes." There, we said it. Leave us alone.



If that wasn't enough, the designers also opted to only allow 150 days of in-game time before the Vault's water supply dried up, adding a sense of urgency to the player's quest through this land of mutants, raiders, monsters and survivors who were trying to eke out a life for themselves in the devastated Californian landscape.

This brings us to another aspect of the game that the *Fallout* team did so very well, in that it created a world that the player genuinely wanted to explore and immerse themselves in. Players really felt that the people in the various towns were going about their day-to-day business, trying to make do as best they could in the wasteland that they had to call home, dealing with the ravages of life in a desolate world. There were relationships, personal struggles, a burgeoning system of trade, and a ton of history to uncover. Indeed, Cain, Anderson, Boyarsky and crew created a very real sense that if one explored long enough, you would uncover just that little bit more of the *Fallout* universe – either through a random encounter, a previously undiscovered location on the map, or perhaps a new dialogue option that hadn't been there earlier in the game. Yet at the same time, players knew that the sands of time were constantly flowing – a delicate balance between free-form exploration and sufficient motivation to stick to the task at hand and locate the much-needed Water Chip that would save the Vault. Plus, as could be expected of the harsh and gritty world it represented, *Fallout* was not without its share of controversial content. Drug use, drug addiction, sex and prostitution, stealing, radical violence and the fact that it was possible to kill children all served to add realism and heighten the sense of immersion thanks to a no-holds-barred vision of what a decimated America of the future might look like.

Everything came together perfectly, and as history has shown, the finished product was an incredible package. *Fallout* was released in September 1997 and immediately attracted a loyal base of players who recognised the significance of the title and what it meant for computer RPGs. The game went on to receive excellent review scores and won numerous awards around the world. Its critical reception, the eager fan base and the ease with which the engine could be worked into another game meant that a sequel was a sure thing, and Cain began working almost right away – but not for very long.

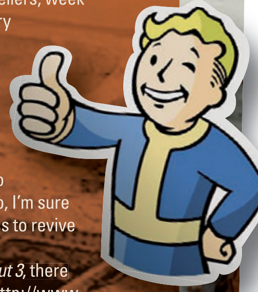
"I wrote the design for *Fallout 2* with Leonard Boyarsky and Jason Anderson and then left Interplay," he says. The big three of Boyarsky, Anderson and Cain, unsatisfied with the conditions at the studio, left to found Troika Games, responsible for *Arcanum, Vampire: The Masquerade* and *Temple Of Elemental Evil*.

Feargus Urquhart, head of Black Isle Studios, had to find replacements for the project, and it would be the talented and experienced RPG designer

GETTING THE GAMES NOW

The original *Fallout* games – *1*, *2* and *Tactics* – were released on **www.gog.com** in late 2008, and the fact that almost a decade had passed yet they nevertheless saw outstanding sales is proof that the series' popularity has not dwindled. For a long time after their launch, *Fallout 1* and *2* were listed on the site as the bestsellers, week after week. "The *Fallout* games were, from the very beginning, one of the bestselling titles," says Lukasz Kukawski, PR and marketing, GOG.com. "All three parts of the classic *Fallout* series are in our all-time top ten bestsellers. What also shows a huge popularity of those games is the fact that the *Fallout* forum has about five times more topics than any other forum on GOG.com! So as you can see, the series is doing really well. Also, I'm sure that the release of *Fallout 3* boosted the willingness to revive the classic parts of the series."

For those keen to see Black Isle's original *Fallout 3*, there are a selection of videos on YouTube. Check out http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1uuDKrY7eW0&feature=fvw



Hitchhiker's Guide to Fallout



ANCHORAGE
Alaska was the scene of the Anchorage Reclamation, where American forces overthrew the Chinese invaders in the Great War.



ARROYO
Arroyo is the settlement founded by the original Vault Dweller and home to his descendant, the Chosen One, somewhere in Oregon.



BONEYARD
The remains of Los Angeles, this is a harsh area with a bit of a Deathclaw problem. Inexperienced travellers should beware.



BROKEN HILLS
The ideal place to visit if you want to appreciate the usually warring mutant, human and ghoul factions living side by side.



CATHEDRAL
Beneath its innocent exterior, the Cathedral hosts a secret Vault, which is home to the evil mutant, the Master.



JUNKTOWN
Living up to its name, Junktown was constructed out of the refuse, wrecked cars and other scraps that litter the wasteland.



KHAN BASE
This small base located near Shady Sands is home to a vicious gang of wasteland raiders. It's not a place to be taken lightly.



KLAMATH
A small town in what was once Oregon, made up of traders and trappers with a large golden gecko population nearby.



MARIPOSA MILITARY BASE
A key location during the military's Forced Evolutionary Virus research, it has since been overrun by the same mutants that it created.



MEGATON
Megaton is one of the largest settlements in the Capital Wasteland, built in a crater not far from Vault 101.



MODOC
Once a quiet, peaceful place, this small town now has a problem with gangs, missing people and even a farm tended by ghosts.



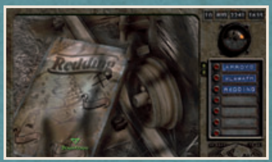
NAVARRO
A dangerous area near a large oil refinery, Navarro is rumoured to be an important location for the nefarious Enclave.



NECROPOLIS
So named because of its ghoulish inhabitants, Necropolis and its sewer system shows just what happens when Vaults aren't closed.



NEW RENO
A gambling city controlled by four mob families and one of the largest locations left physically unscathed by the Great War.



REDDING
A mining town near to Vault City. Be sure to check out Mayor Ascorti's casino for fun and profit at an early stage of the game.



RIVET CITY
This once-devastated and now refurbished aircraft carrier is home to the largest human settlement in the Washington DC area.



SAN FRANCISCO
The remains of this sprawling metropolis are now populated by the Shi people, as well as the Hubologist religious fanatics.



SHADY SANDS
The original name of a small settlement that later grew into the now large and powerful New California Republic.



THE DEN
Unprepared travellers are advised to steer clear of the many slavers, drug addicts and prostitutes that frequent the Den.



THE GLOW
This is the nickname of the obliterated West Tek Research Facility, destroyed by a direct hit from a nuclear bomb.



THE HUB
One of the largest cities in post-apocalyptic California, it serves as a central location for many merchants' caravans and trade routes.



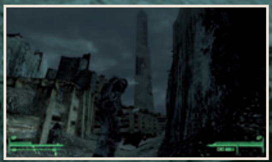
THE PITT
This decimated city is home to many raiders and slaves. Travellers should beware of a Troglodyte Degeneration Contagion outbreak.



VAULT 13
Location of a Water Chip malfunction, which started a chain of events that shaped the future of the wasteland.



VAULT CITY
One of the more impressive cities constructed after the bombs hit, but the locals are a little unfriendly to outsiders.



WASHINGTON MONUMENT
This once-proud area is now brimming over with Super Mutants engaged in trench warfare against the Brotherhood of Steel.



Chris Avellone who took the helm. Coming on board to such a successful, popular and established IP was not a simple task, and as could be expected, there were a number of challenges with regards to jumping in on an existing game world after design and production had already started.

"I was thrown onto it," says Avellone of his sudden repositioning. "I was pulled off working on [*Planescape*] *Torment*, given a two-page area brief for New Reno written by Tim Cain, I think, then told to go. So I did, then I took over Vault City from Feargus, adding more quests and rewriting sections of it, along with the Luck Easter eggs; the Raider Camp, which I didn't spend enough time on, so it ended up being more of a combat area with too many guns; and finally, the high Luck encounters for the world map."

Fallout 2 turned into a larger project than the original, with improvements to a number of areas that had proven unpopular in *Fallout*. One of the first things to go was any kind of time limit. This, of course, allowed the player more freedom, but Avellone believes this came with a cost. "I do think that the lack of a time limit in *Fallout 2* hurt the skill usage," he explains, "mostly because Doctor and First Aid and other time-based skills had no drawback to using them." Party AI was also significantly reworked – control over followers in the first game was very limited – and there were considerably more side quests, new weapons, and at one point the player was even able to acquire a nuclear-powered car for traversing the wastes.

Fallout 2, like its predecessor, went on to massive success, but its somewhat small development period of little more than one year inevitably resulted in a number of bugs making their way into the final product, as well as some intended content having to be cut. Those keen to experience what the game may well have been like with more staff and a longer development schedule should download the *Fallout 2* Restoration Project, which includes new locations, extra random encounters and additional quests and characters that were not finished in time to ship.

Despite these minor shortcomings, Avellone and his team had released another great title and the computer RPG had, by now, solidly found its feet again. *Fallout 1* and *2* paved the way for the likes of *Baldur's Gate* and its sequel, the genre going strong in a time more often remembered for PlayStations and *Quake* clones.

> "Interplay fired the entire development team, killing the project and any hope of a Fallout 3"

After enjoying the great success of *Planescape: Torment* and the *Icewind Dale* series, Black Isle Studios got to work on *Baldur's Gate III: The Black Hound*, which was to run on its newly designed 3D Jefferson Engine. In the meantime, two more *Fallout* games would see the light of day – squad-based combat game *Fallout Tactics* and the console-only *Brotherhood Of Steel* – but these were significant departures from what had come before (see boxout) and broke away from the core *Fallout* series. No, the hardcore fans wanted a true sequel and it was not long thereafter that Interplay's poor financial situation, coupled with resistance on the part of TSR, which owned *Dungeons & Dragons* at the time, meant that work on *Baldur's Gate III* ended up having to be scrapped. Black Isle managed to salvage its work, however, by shifting its energy into a replacement project: *Fallout 3*.

Codenamed *Van Buren*, it was to see a grand war between the Brotherhood of Steel and the New California Republic, with a crazed scientist in control of an orbiting nuclear arsenal thrown in for good measure. A fair amount of work was completed, areas designed and artwork detailed, but then, late in 2003, tragedy struck. Interplay was at an all-time low, the company in crushingly dire financial straits, and management chose to fire the entire *Van Buren* development team, killing the project in the process, and along with it any hope of a *Fallout 3*. Black Isle Studios was essentially gone, and fans were distraught – months of work and the continuation of one of the most popular gaming franchises ever seemed on the brink of disappearing into obscurity. That was until Bethesda acquired the rights to the *Fallout* franchise the following year. *Fallout 3* would live again.

Bethesda Softworks knew that it had a mammoth task on its hands, well aware that hardcore *Fallout* fans were sceptical of its ability to craft a sequel that would live up to the *Fallout* legacy. Known for the *Elder Scrolls* series, most recently *Morrowind* and *Oblivion*, Bethesda's track history was that of first-person perspective, real-time RPGs – something quite untested in the *Fallout* universe – and there were doubts that the franchise would survive the transition. As Peter Hines, VP of PR and marketing at Bethesda, explains, "It was a daunting challenge, but



THOSE OTHER FALLOUT GAMES

Fallout Tactics (released on the PC) and *Fallout: Brotherhood Of Steel* (released on the Xbox and PS2) are an interesting sort. They can be seen as branches off the main *Fallout* path, with *Tactics*, as the name suggests, being a squad-based tactical combat game set in the *Fallout* universe. *Tactics* is a strange beast, with some loyal fans absolutely loving its brilliant combat system and its close adherence to *Fallout* lore. On the other hand, many fans of the original games were disappointed at *Tactics*' linearity, in stark contrast to the open-ended nature of the RPGs that preceded it.

Fallout: Brotherhood Of Steel was again a different affair, this time coming in as a *Diablo*-esque action RPG. On the whole, it is something of a dungeon crawler based on *Fallout* lore, with the developer having taken liberties with the plot and storyline to such an extent that the hardcore *Fallout* fans – and some of them truly are hardcore fanatics – don't consider its storyline to be canon.





» [PC] Black Isle's efforts at *Fallout 3*, referred to as *Van Buren*, were ultimately doomed.



» [PC] *Fallout 3*'s improved Pip-Boy 3000, preserving the beloved SPECIAL system and art style.

Fallout Timeline

1983 Brian Fargo founds Interplay, later responsible for such titles as *Planescape: Torment*, *Earthworm Jim* and *Fallout*.

1987 *Wasteland* is released. A deep, engrossing post-nuclear RPG, it is a true precursor to *Fallout*.

1990 Electronic Arts releases *Fountain Of Dreams*, originally a follow-up to *Wasteland* but eventually a standalone title.

1996 The team that would become Black Isle Studios is first assembled. Among it was Tim Cain and Leonard Boyarsky.

1997 *Fallout* is released to rave reviews, single-handedly reviving the stagnating and slowly dying computer RPG genre.

1998 Black Isle Studios officially created, named by founder Feargus Urquhart after Black Isle in Scotland.

1998 *Fallout 2* is completed, released, and universally praised as a worthy successor to the original.

2001 *Fallout Tactics* is completed by Australian game developer Micro Forté.

2003 *Van Buren*, Black Isle's *Fallout 3*, is cancelled. The Jefferson Engine, along with *Baldur's Gate III*, is put to rest.

2004 Development rights for *Fallout 3* are sold off to RPG developer Bethesda Softworks.

2004 *Fallout: Brotherhood Of Steel* is released for consoles. Some hardcore fans criticise its departure from the earlier titles.

2008 *Fallout 3* is let loose to hordes of drooling fans and wins numerous Game of the Year awards from the gaming press.

2009 January – *Operation Anchorage*, *Fallout 3*'s first expansion, is released. It takes place inside a simulation.

2009 March – *The Pitt*, *Fallout 3*'s second DLC, sees players enter a raider settlement in a devastated Pittsburgh.

2009 April – *Fallout: New Vegas* is announced. Scheduled for release in 2010, the game is being developed by Obsidian.

2009 May – *Broken Steel* extends *Fallout 3*'s main quest as well as upping the level cap to 30.

2009 June – Bethesda releases *Fallout 3*'s fourth expansion, *Point Lookout*, in which players explore swampy Maryland.

2009 August – *Fallout 3*'s final add-on mission, named *Mothership Zeta*, sees the Lone Wanderer traversing an orbiting alien ship.

anything worthwhile is not without risks and obstacles. We felt like we were up to the task, and if we stuck to our guns, we could make a game that appealed to gamers of all shapes and sizes, be they new to *Fallout* or long-time fans."

Bethesda bridged the real-time/turn-based gap with VATS, or Vault-Tec Assisted Targeting System, which allowed players to freeze time and initiate a number of attacks according to their available Action Points. "We knew we had to do something to keep the pace moving and not stop the player every time they came across an enemy," says Hines, "so VATS was really invented by Todd [Howard] and Emil [Pagliarulo] to address that: give the player the ability to stop time when they wanted to in order to make tactical decisions, instead of forcing them to stop when the game decided."

The developers also put a great amount of effort into faithfully bringing familiar items, concepts and other aspects of *Fallout* lore into their title. "Probably the biggest challenge was just all the research and iterations the team put into bringing a lot of iconic 2D items into a full 3D world," explains Hines. "The Vault suits are no longer tiny outfits on a character; they're being worn by people you can walk up to and look at in detail, including your own character. Same with the Pip-Boy: it's now a functioning device attached to your arm. What's it look like? What do all the buttons and knobs do? The team spent a lot of time going over and over those questions until they got it right."

After nearly four years in development, Bethesda brought the *Fallout* universe to the current generation of gaming hardware, and the series saw another incredible hit and, indeed, another landmark title. This time the adventure took place in a devastated Washington DC, many years after the events in *Fallout 2*. Bethesda succeeded in capturing the spirit of the franchise on multiple levels, including its artistic design,



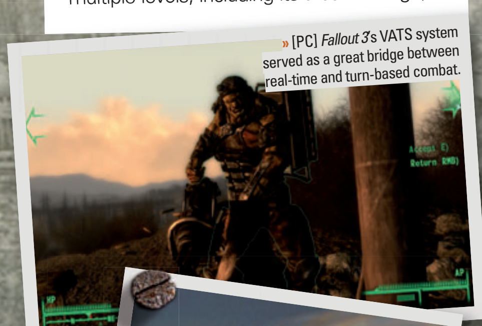
» [PC] *Fallout Tactics* was a departure from the RPGs that came before it.

free-form roaming and intricate character development, all within a storyline that stuck true to the foundations set by the previous games. Despite the inevitable disgruntled fan who believed things should have stayed isometric and turn-based, we at **Retro Gamer** feel that *Fallout 3* has undoubtedly earned its place in the series' canon. What's more, it is testament to Bethesda's success that the original creators think so highly of the new title. "I loved *Fallout 3*," says Tim Cain, now design director at Carbine Studios, who designed the *Fallout* universe so long ago and has watched numerous others take his ball and run with it. "That's not to say I wouldn't have done things differently, but Bethesda really seems to 'get' *Fallout*. The series is in good hands."

Boyarsky, too, is pleased yet humble about the ongoing popularity of the series he helped create. "It's pretty satisfying that people love what we made. I thought at the time people would love it because we did, but I wasn't thinking ten years in the future. The fact that there are fans who know who I am and write me letters saying how much they loved *Fallout* still surprises me. *Fallout* felt like a bunch of guys – and a few girls – hiding in the corner making our own little game. While we, of course, wanted it to be popular and sell, we were really first and foremost just making the game that we wanted to play."

The story thus far draws to a close now, dear readers, after three core series titles, two spin-off games, a tabletop war game and five expansion packs. What's more, in April 2009 it was revealed that Bethesda had filed for a trademark, which would give it sole rights to use the *Fallout* name for "entertainment services in the nature of an ongoing television program" as well as "motion picture films about a post-nuclear apocalyptic world". It seems that *Fallout* is going nowhere, folks, and our favourite post-nuclear role-playing game is still going to be around for a long time yet. With Obsidian Entertainment, comprised of many former Black Isle Studios staffers, hard at work on *Fallout: New Vegas*, plus a *Fallout* MMORPG potentially on the way and a constant stream of mods and extra content from the active fan community, it's clear that we can expect a lot more from the franchise indeed. *Fallout 4*, perhaps? As Bethesda's Peter Hines says, "It definitely sounds like a good idea."

» [PC] *Fallout 3*'s VATS system served as a great bridge between real-time and turn-based combat.





THE MAKING OF...

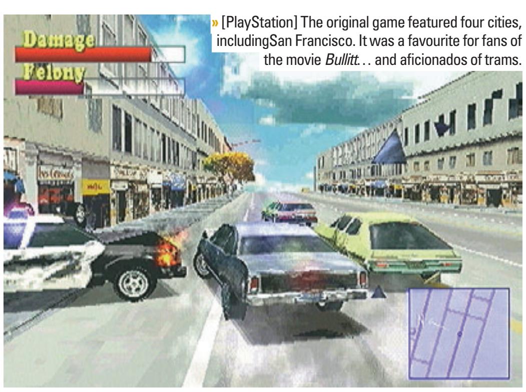
DRIVER

FOLLOWING THE HULLABALOO OF DRIV3R, THE DRIVER FRANCHISE RECEIVED AN INDELIBLE SCRATCH TO ITS PAINTWORK. STUART HUNT WENT UNDERCOVER TO TRACK DOWN TONY OAKDEN, THE LEAD DESIGNER OF THE FIRST DRIVER GAME, AND SHED SOME LIGHT ON THE CHEQUERED HISTORY OF REFLECTIONS' NOTORIOUS DRIVING SERIES



Whatever your opinion of the *Driver* series, no one can argue that it wasn't a technical marvel. It was a free-roaming 3D driving/action game that broke game genres like police roadblocks, and squeezed every last ounce of juice from Sony's 32-bit engine. Stepping back to fully appreciate the skid marks it left – that's enough of the driving analogies from us, we promise – *Driver* was also the first game to really stir imaginations as to what could be achieved when you combine polygons with a virtual sandbox, thus it likely proved a significant influence on the direction of the *Grand Theft Auto* series. Actually, the obvious similarities between the two franchises spawned a good-humoured rivalry between their respective developers (see 'Same Difference' boxout). *Driver* was unarguably a watershed sandbox title; one that sits shotgun beside the *Grand Theft Auto* series and classics like *Turbo Esprit* and *Elite*. And it still remains the bestselling episode in the series to this day.

Tony Oakden was the lead programmer on the game, and first got into computing in the mid-Eighties after receiving an Acorn Electron and getting fully immersed in Superior Software's adventure/platform classic, *Citadel*. After pumping a scary number of hours into Michael Jacobson's game, Tony decided to try his hand at programming and immediately got hooked on writing his own games. After releasing a few games for Superior and then setting off to university, Tony began writing software for slot machines but returned to games in the late Nineties when he joined Reflections Interactive and was tasked with leading the programming team on a new project, titled *Driver*.



» [PlayStation] The original game featured four cities, includingSan Francisco. It was a favourite for fans of the movie *Bullitt*. . . and aficionados of trams.

Newcastle-based Reflections Interactive was formed in 1984 by Martin Edmondson and had seen success with the Amiga hit *Shadow Of The Beast* and *Destruction Derby* on the PlayStation. When Tony joined the team there were five PC programmers, two PlayStation programmers, plus a small art team working on *Driver*, but this would swell to 25 developers across both formats by the time the game was eventually finished – still a relatively small team to be working on such a big title. Tony told us that *Driver*'s inception can be traced back to Reflections owner Martin Edmondson. A big fan of classic cars and movies that involved car chases, Martin saw *Driver* as a bit of a pet project; a view also shared by *Driver*'s talented and enthusiastic team.

"I think Martin basically wanted a game that captured the essence of those car chase scenes from the late Seventies. The other thing he really wanted was for players to be able to drive freely around a 3D city, going wherever they wanted," Tony continues, "Up until *Driver*, 3D racing games were very limited in where players could go. Most were either linear racers or top-down like *GTA*. For quite a bit of the development period the only thing a player could do was drive around the city practising cool racing stunts."

While the concept of a racing game that allowed you to perform hair-raising stunts would later form the basis for


CALIFORNIA
DPR 068

THE MAKING OF… DRIVER

Reflections' game *Stuntman*, the team decided to add a story and missions to *Driver*. Objectives varied from scaring a passenger half to death by taking him on an insane joyride, stealing cop cars, to even driving the President to safety, while *Driver*'s story centred on a New York police officer and 'ex racing boy' named Tanner, who is sent to work undercover as a wheelman to infiltrate a dangerous crime syndicate. The missions all played out across four large cities – Miami, San Francisco, Los Angeles and New York – with some of the artists who were working on the game sent out to the respective cities to take pictures and get reference material. It shows too. The cities, for a PlayStation game, were all faithfully recreated, in particular San Francisco. The setting for the iconic chase movie *Bullitt*, the virtual city of San Fran featured its famous undulating roads and its invincible trams.

The story harked back to classic Seventies cinema – most notably Walter Hill's *The Driver*. But Tony reveals that *Starsky & Hutch*, *The Dukes Of Hazzard* and *The Blues Brothers* also played a part in the overall design of the game – we suspect the crazy, slapstick and often suicidal actions of the chasing police. Tanner is much more of a mystery, though. Three games later and still we know very little about *Driver*'s central character, other than that he struggles to function when not behind the wheel of a car (see *Driver 2* and *Driv3r*) and was once voiced by actor Michael Madsen (hear *Driv3r*). Perhaps Tony might be able to shed some light on the inner workings of *Driver*'s mysterious protagonist?

"I wasn't involved in this so can't comment with any authority, but I think [Reflections] wanted a character who was typical of the quintessential Seventies car movie drivers, so they looked at all the films from that genre and came up with a character that had the best traits from them. From the front Tanner looks a lot like Martin's brother, Gareth Edmondson, but I don't know if that's just a coincidence."

> **"Driver harked back to classic Seventies cinema – most notably Walter Hill's The Driver"**

One thing separating *Driver* from its sequels was the fact that Tanner stayed… well, pretty much undercover, and inside a car for the entire duration of the game, save for cut-scenes. But Reflections would later add on-foot sections in *Driver 2*, so, knowing that it was possible to have Tanner stretch his legs on the PSone hardware, we were curious as to whether it was something the team ever considered incorporating in the original game.

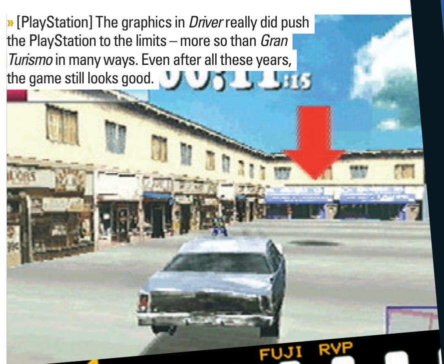
"We never considered it for *Driver 1*, although we did play about with cameras attached to pedestrians to see what they looked like," reveals Tony. "Technically there were quite a few problems with doing it. Also, the game world wasn't designed for navigating on foot. There were places the player could go on foot that would break the game. From a design POV, the first game was always going to be about driving. The one thing we did drop was shadow casting from the buildings. I did quite a bit of experimentation with that and had some good-looking results. But we couldn't get the performance up to the point where it was practical for the full game."

In hindsight, not having on-foot sections was actually a deft move by Reflections. It allowed the team to focus its attention on those subtle presentational touches, and refining the driving physics – areas where *Driver* excelled. Satisfyingly overzealous, the handling of vehicles was in keeping with





» [iPhone] Gameloft has just released a port of *Driver* for Apple's iPhone. Expect a review in the next issue of the magazine.



» [PlayStation] The graphics in *Driver* really did push the PlayStation to the limits – more so than *Gran Turismo* in many ways. Even after all these years, the game still looks good.

MULTI STOREY CAR LARK

We couldn't talk about the development of *Driver* without mentioning the game's notorious tutorial level. The opening stage, which takes place in an underground car park, caused quite a lot of bitterness by PlayStation owners back in the day. Many argued that it was an infuriating opening to the game – especially as failure to complete the prologue/tutorial mission prevented access to the actual main game. We quizzed Tony, who coded the level, to come clean and explain himself.

"We wanted to include a tutorial in the game to ensure that players understood how to get the best from the controls and car physics," he admits. "The cars in *Driver* really come into their own when you push them to the limit. We picked a car park because it's a nice enclosed environment with plenty of natural hazards, so we didn't have to push the fiction too far to make it feel like a real-world criminal driving test. It is quite a hard test to get past but in a way I think it's good because it sets the standard for the rest of the game. I think most players got past it eventually and enjoyed the game more as a result of this initial test. Part of the problem with today's players is that they are mollycoddled too much, I think, and games are too easy. This was one of the levels I coded, so I played it a lot and got very good at it."







» [PlayStation] Adhering to the rules of the road – basically driving like a pensioner and stopping for red lights – was a good way to not draw unwanted attention from blue flashing lights.

the insanity of the stunts and chin-stroking moves seen in movie land. Tyre screeches, 90-degree handbrake turns and smoking rubber skid marks, even flimsy hubcaps whizzing off up the road – it was all in there. And the icing on the cake was the game's popular and addictive Director mode, which only helped to highlight all of these nice presentational touches brilliantly. A great addition to *Driver*, the mode allowed wannabe Michael Bays to shoot and cut their own mini chase movie using a simple, if at times a little unwieldy, free-form camera system. Furthermore, it allowed magazines of the day to effortlessly take dynamic and exciting-looking cinematic screenshots to best show off the game. Nearly all games today feature a similar camera system; it's just we're not privy to it, and it's the trick to how developers can manage to take impressive-looking press shots and cut exciting trailers of their games through perspectives not possible in-game. Control of this camera is usually removed by the developer before the game's release. So how did the idea to have a dynamic replay system and Director mode actually come about?

"I think Martin really wanted to make his own movies!" reveals Tony. "The Director system was designed to allow a player to create a great-looking movie of the game with minimum effort. I think it's a really good system. We had the replay system working fairly early in the project, but the actual camera controls didn't go in until later. Once in, we used the system to make the promotional in-game videos for when the game was run in stores in demo mode."

Driver took Reflections around 18 months to finish, with the team facing many technical hurdles along the way. Such issues included trying to occlude buildings that couldn't be seen in a bid to increase the frame rate, spooling data from the CD in real-time as the player drove about the city, and the biggest headache for Tony: getting the dynamic replay system to work for the movies.

"We didn't have the memory to store position data for all the objects in the scene for each frame of animation, so I developed a system that just stored player input, but it relied on everything being totally deterministic. Every so often a bit of code would get added that wasn't deterministic – something different happened each time it was run – and the replays would break, like suddenly the player's car would drive into a wall and then everything would turn to custard – usually in the middle of the night just before a big show, and I'd end up working through the night to try and work out what the problem was. I got so used to seeing the replays go wrong that I got paranoid," Tony continues. "The first time I saw the game demoing in the shops and a replay was running I had to watch it through about ten times to reassure myself that they were working properly! It was a great marketing tool because the replay movies looked great."

Driver was released in June 1999 for the PlayStation, and on the PC, Mac and Game Boy Color the following

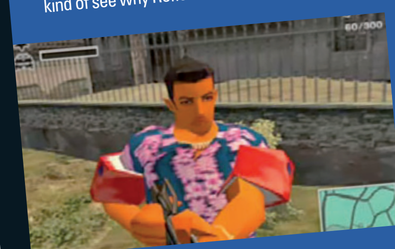
SAME DIFFERENCE

The similarities between the *Grand Theft Auto* and *Driver* franchises spawned a bit of rivalry between their respective developers. Both Rockstar North and Reflections made humorously cheeky references to each other's games. Want to know what they were? We thought you might. Well, here they are, and we even threw in accompanying screenshots too – we're good to you guys.



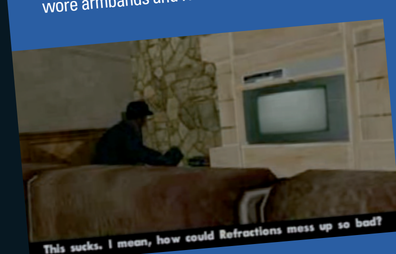
TWO-FACED TANNER

Rockstar North drew blood first by including a mission in *GTA III* titled 'Two-Faced Tanner'. It saw the player tasked with trying to kill a cop who was working undercover as a wheelman. Nothing too satirical, you might think, but as the target was crudely animated and walked like a girl, you can kind of see why Reflections saw fit to retaliate.



THE TIMMY VERMICELLIS

That Reflections chose *Driv3r* to rip into *GTA* was, in hindsight, probably not the savviest of moves. Nonetheless, poking fun at the fact that the main character in *Vice City*, Tommy Vercetti, couldn't swim, Reflections peppered its game with Tommy-a-likes, named Timmy Vermicellis, that wore armbands and Hawaiian shirts.



MADD DOGG'S MANSION

By the time *San Andreas* arrived, the gloves were off. During a mission where the player must break into a mansion, a cut-scene flashes up of a guy playing a videogame and moaning about the way the main character moves. Confirming that the game in question is indeed *Driver*, he says: "Tanner, you suck ass!"

PORTABLE RUNABOUT

We caught up with **David Leitch**, who programmed the Game Boy Color port of Driver





■ How did you get the opportunity to work on the GBC version of *Driver*?

When Crawfish landed the conversion job I'd recently finished another GBC project for them – *Space Invaders* – and *Driver* seemed like a good fit for the next one.

■ How much input did you receive from Reflections with regard to how the game had to look and play?

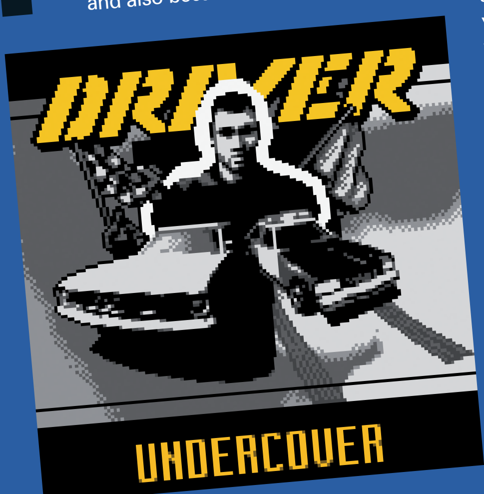
The basic design elements – the overhead perspective, presentation and graphic style – were nailed down before I signed on to do it. So I can't say for certain, but presumably Reflections had some input or sign-off on those. I definitely got the feeling during the course of the project that they had an element of creative sign-off on the whole thing but, for the most part, I was at the end of the communication chain. The interesting thing was towards the end Reflections began to get really enthusiastic about it. To be fair, I reckon that they probably didn't have such high expectations for it at the outset, so when the GBC version began to work nicely, in its own limited way, it generated a little bit of a 'wow' factor.

■ Were there any technical issues you encountered during the game's development?

Player car handling aside, the main thing was getting the other traffic working nicely, to give the player the sense that they were driving around a little city. We could only keep a fairly small number of civilian and police cars 'alive' at any one time, so there was a system to cull vehicles exiting the visible part of the map and regenerate them into the incoming lanes at the screen edges. The traffic also had to behave in a reasonably plausible way at junctions and avoid driving into other cars that had stopped ahead of them. The mission scripting was all done in code, because there wasn't a quick and simple way of me putting together something to allow the designer to do it, but I really enjoyed that part. There was also a lot of map information for a GBC game – each of the cities was pretty big and, as well as putting the artwork together, they all needed collision maps including info telling the traffic which way to travel. But thankfully, I didn't have to do any of that stuff.

■ Was there anything you were forced to leave out of the game due to technical restraints?

We left out the training missions, partly to save space and development time and also because, in the big versions, they were mainly orientated around showing off all the different things you could do with your car, and we didn't have nearly as much variety in ours.



■ Were you a fan of the original game?

I got really into the PC version and played it a lot while we were making the GBC one. Curiously, I'm not much of a fan of car games in general – I love *Mario Kart* and that's about as good as it gets for me. But the original version of *Driver* is a really excellent game. As well as pushing the envelope technically, Reflections got the gameplay spot-on too.

year. It became the biggest hit on Sony's console, though. Even though the success it garnered is no surprise, Sony's machine was nearing the end of its commercial life, and *Driver* looked better than anything that had appeared on the machine until that point. As a result, the franchise fast became synonymous with the PlayStation and popular with its owners. So it might come as a surprise to some of you to learn that, at one stage, *Driver* wasn't destined to appear on the system at all. Tony explains…

"The game was intended to be developed for the PC, but after about six months of development the company decided that the PlayStation was going to become the dominant game hardware and that emphasis should switch to that. It turned out to be a very good decision because the PS version outsold the PC many times over. Technically, it was a bit of a nightmare to port code from the PC to the PlayStation. The PlayStation isn't particularly hard to program for, in my opinion, but by the late Nineties it was already quite dated compared to current-generation PCs with dedicated video cards. The processor was quite a bit slower than the standard PC of the day, there was hardly any RAM, no hardware floating point support at all, and a rather primitive rendering system with no z-buffer or perspective correction. So we had to take the version made for the PC, which had all that extra processing power and hardware, and make it work on the PlayStation. We had to pull all sorts of tricks to make the game work, let alone look good."

There were things that did let *Driver* down, though. It had harsh difficulty spikes, long loading times, small draw distances and even the occasional gremlin in the engine. While these bugs could sometimes be amusing, usually resulting in some physics-twisting collision that threw your car into the sky, the sporadic difficulty spikes – in particular the final few levels – were undoubtedly responsible for a few mutilated PlayStation pads. We chose our words carefully when broaching the subject with Tony, but he kindly granted us an honest and logical explanation as to why the game featured these problems.

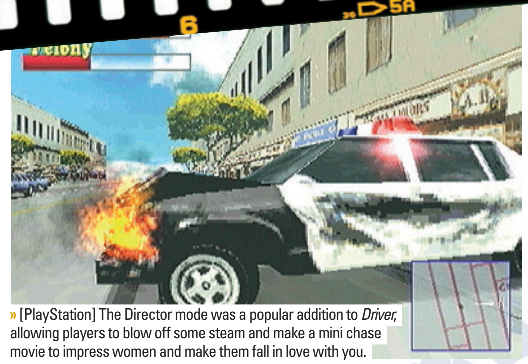








» [PlayStation] The cops in *Driver* were unrelenting, insane and probably indestructible cyborgs sent from the future to kill Tanner. Why else would they drive like that?



» [PlayStation] The Director mode was a popular addition to *Driver,* allowing players to blow off some steam and make a mini chase movie to impress women and make them fall in love with you.

"I think there are a few glitches, but you have to remember that this game was pushing the boundaries in terms of what the PlayStation could do. A lot of people said we'd never be able to make a free-roaming driving game on the PlayStation at all. That's the thing about true pioneers, isn't it? They are exciting and great but tend to be a bit rough around the edges."

As we're on the subject, *Driver* was bookended by two particularly frustrating sections: the opening garage tutorial, which forced gamers to prove their mettle by completing an torturous obstacle course set in a claustrophobic garage; and the game's final stage, 'The President's Run', which found Tanner on an insanely challenging mission to protect the President by circumventing an unrelenting onslaught of seemingly overpowered and super fast police and mob cars. We remember spending an entire Sunday afternoon trying to finish that final mission, and only managed it using a combination of sheer fluke and dogged determination. So the opportunity to quiz Tony about that final stage, and exorcise a few demons of our own, was too good to pass up.

"This game pushed the boundaries of what the PlayStation could do"

"I have a confession to make: I never got past this level! I did play through the game up to this point, but by then I was so *Driver*-ed out that I simply couldn't take any more, so I consoled myself with the fact that I'd seen all the missions and seen the end-of-game cut-scene anyway on the artists' machines. I seem to remember that we did throw everything at the player in that final section to make it as hard as we could, but it is possible to complete with the right mix of strategy and skill. I watched Martin play the level and he made it look really easy." Tony continues: "For a driving game, which appears to be superficially all about skill, there is a surprising amount of strategy required to finish some of the levels, including this one."

Given the success of *Driver,* the game saw a sequel the following year. Larger than the previous game, *Driver 2: Back On The Streets* added a two-player split-screen mode and allowed Tanner the freedom to explore the city on foot and commandeer other vehicles. Despite further pushing the limitations of the PlayStation, the game received mixed reviews from the press. Some praised the sequel for its ambition, while others criticised it for failing to address some of the issues in the first game.

Tony eventually left Reflections and the UK when he and his wife decided to emigrate to Australia. Still working in the industry today, Tony has worked for a number of developers with studios based in Oz. He was producer on *Fallout Tactics* and, more recently, the PC version of *BioShock* for 2K Australia. Tony also co-owns Subversive Games, a company that make serious games for corporate clients, and flexes his love for more quirky indie games with his other venture, Charlie Dog Games.

This side of the world, the *Driver* story continued. In 2004 Reflections – then owned by Atari – released the hotly anticipated third instalment of the *Driver* franchise, *Driv3r.* Taking even more cues from *GTA,* it placed further emphasis on on-foot sections and gunplay, and also added more varied vehicles to the mix, including motorcycles and boats. It was also the first game in the franchise to allow players to mow down and shoot innocent civilians. However, the game was criticised and poorly received by the press and the public. While the game does have its enjoyable parts, the issues mainly lay with its unstable-feeling world, awkward combat and terrible controls. And when Martin Edmondson left Reflections in 2004, it seemed like the end for the franchise.

That was until Reflections was sold to Ubisoft, for a reported sum of £24 million. Under the management of Martin's brother, Gareth Edmondson, and rebranded Ubisoft Reflections, the team set to work on a new *Driver* game. *Driver: Parallel Lines* saw a return to something more like the original game, with the team deciding to drop the clumsy on-foot sections and focus more on the driving. Tanner was also dropped – although the game does make a jokey mention of him towards the end – replaced with a new, but forgettable, protagonist named TK. *Parallel Lines* also dropped the multiple cities, keeping the action centred on the Big Apple, and the popular Director mode was also omitted. The game was better received than *Driv3r* and also received a PSP prequel, *Driver 76,* which was co-developed by Sumo Digital.

Today, the *Driver* series is still ticking over, with word that Reflections is working on a new *Driver* game for the PS3 and Xbox 360 – a project that was first whispered to be happening in 2006. Three years later, and with still no game, many thought the project was dropped. In 2009, however, Ubisoft filed for a trademark on the name '*Driver: The Recruit*', reigniting rumours that the game is coming. If a current-gen reboot does appear, we hope Reflections looks back to the first and most successful game in the franchise for inspiration. An update of *Driver,* with a main focus on driving, stunts and physics, bolstered with a great Director mode, would certainly be a winning formula in our eyes. Let's hope *Driver* spins a full 180.

ARABIAN FIGHT

SINBAD OR SINGOOD?



- » **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- » **RELEASED:** 1992
- » **GENRE:** ARCADE BRAWLER
- » **FEATURED HARDWARE:** ARCADE
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £100



HISTORY

If you've never played *Arabian Fight* then you're missing out on a real treat. Sega's Arabian-themed side-scrolling brawler might not have garnered the same reception and passionate fan base as *Golden Axe* or *Streets Of Rage*, but it still remains one of the best arcade brawlers from Sega.

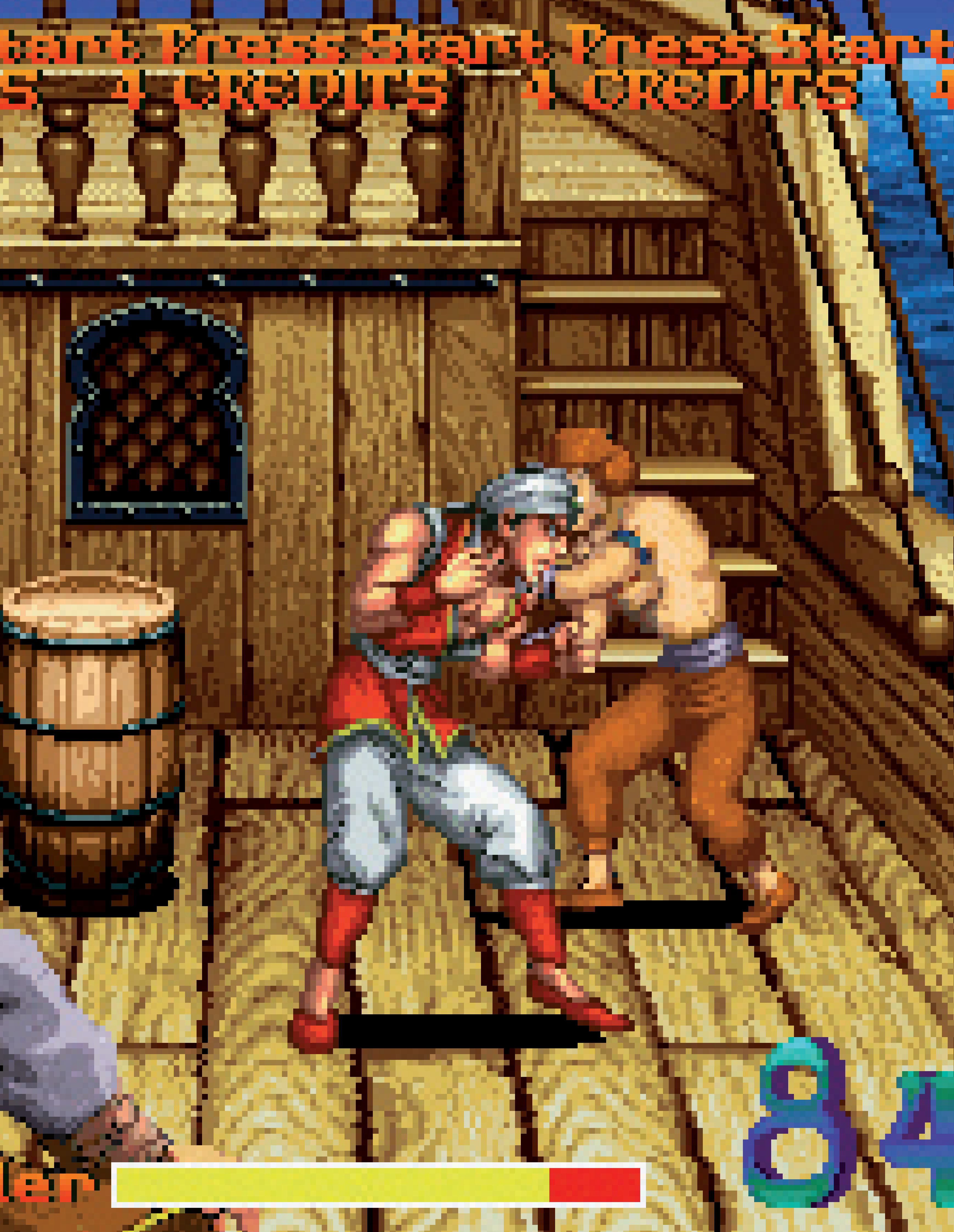
Basically just *Golden Axe* with an Arabian theme, *Arabian Fight* saw four typical fighting game heroes – a girl dressed in next to nothing, a strong wrestler type, a middleweight all-rounder and a bald guy who looks like a monk – and put them in a series of short stages full of mythological beasts to duff up. With a simple control system that comprised of just two buttons – one for attack, one for jump, and then holding down to unleash a bit of magic – *Arabian Fight* fell effortlessly into the realm of button-basher, and some were quick to criticise it for feeling repetitive as a result.

However, helping it to win appeal with some, *Arabian Fight* had a few neat gimmicks stashed. Firstly, the game was wonderfully presented, with all characters lavishly drawn in striking anime-style graphics that made the game feel like an interactive film, similar in style to *Road Avenger*. Second, the game boasted a quirky use of sprite-scaling whereby enemies and characters would appear bigger the closer they were to the screen, and some would come into sight as detailed illustrations in the foreground before seamlessly jumping into the fray as regular sprites.

Ironically, it was these neat presentational aspects of *Arabian Fight* that worked against it in many ways. The giant sprites, coupled with a large number of enemies and the screen-blocking illustrations that frequently flashed up, meant that things could get a bit hectic, particularly when four people were playing simultaneously.

For all its issues, if you're a fan of side-scrolling fighters you should take the time to check out *Arabian Fight*. If you can look past its faults, you'll find one of the most lavish and ambitious brawlers of the Nineties.




Press Start Press Start
4 CREDITS 4 CREDITS
84

“Imagine asked me if I could write a game in a month. I'd not been near a Spectrum at that point”

Interviews the old-fashioned way…



FAMOUS FOR
Spectrum games

FIRST JOB
White van man

CURRENT JOB
Principal programmer, Evolution Studios

FAVOURITE FILM
Blade Runner

FAVOURITE ALBUM
Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band

FIRST COMPUTER
ZX81

BEST GAMING ACHIEVEMENT
Badlands Pete. My best technical achievement, though not my best game!

BESTSELLING GAME
Zzoom or Stonkers

BEST HOLIDAY
Seeing the family in Thailand

WHO YOU WANT TO BE STRANDED WITH
Steve Cain. He was a wonderful man with a great sense of humour, and it still brings a lump to my throat thinking that he's dead.

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SEX
M

NAME
John Gibson

DATE OF BIRTH
08 MAY 1947

PLACE OF BIRTH
London

BIOGRAPHY
John came to programming late, but then produced a trio of Spectrum titles for Imagine and got embroiled in the ill-fated Bandersnatch megagame. He went on to form Denton Designs and later joined Psygnosis, leading to his current work on the MotorStorm series.

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John Gibson

What cherished games would you take to the island?

DESERT • ISLAND • DISKS

He might have come late to the party, but John Gibson brought a bundle of goodies. He was the coder behind Zzoom, Frankie Goes To Hollywood and Gift From The Gods and was the last man to see Bandersnatch alive

It's 29 June 1984, and John Gibson is in the toilets at Imagine Software. And he's not alone.

"The bailiffs had arrived," he begins, recalling the very public meltdown of the once-great 8-bit developer. "Our boss, Dave Lawson, said to me and Eugene Evans, 'Grab your computers, go out the back, run down the stairs, stick 'em in your cars and drive 'em to my house. As long as we've got them we're all right.' Well, we were going downstairs when we saw the receivers coming up the stairs towards us, so I said, 'Quick, in the toilets.' We ran in and stood on the pan with the bloody computers in our arms. The bailiffs actually came in and started looking under the toilet doors…"

Let's leave John balancing on that bog seat, carrying a computer containing all the code for the much-hyped megagame *Bandersnatch*, and ponder his unlikely route to that cubicle. Born into post-war Britain, his childhood was more about rationing that raster scanning. His teenage years in the Sixties were spent strumming a guitar, including a stint playing bass in The Mourners, whose lead singer, Les Gray, would go on to have the world at his *Tiger Feet* with glam rockers Mud. It wasn't until the start of the Eighties that John would finally get his fingers on the flat keyboard of Sir Clive's black beauty.

"I was living down in Cornwall, fixing ceilings for a living," he recalls. "I got myself a ZX81 for something to do. I don't really know why, to be honest. I had an interest in computers even though I'd never been near them. I though I'd have a play round with one at home but it was very limited what you could do – dead slow and nothing really happened. Then I came across this book *Teach Yourself Machine Code* and I learned assembly language."

John says this nonchalantly, but a bloke in his mid-thirties with no programming background becoming fluent in those hexadecimal hieroglyphics is no mean feat. He recounts with some fondness his fly in a bottle homebrew ZX81 game and his fortune-telling effort for the VIC-20, his next machine. Clearly enchanted with these early home micros, John joined a government training scheme as an analyst programmer but was somewhat disappointed to discover that this mainly involved checking piles of punchcards for missing holes before they were fed into a massive mainframe computer. Still, it gave him the confidence to apply for a job with a Liverpool-based business machines company on completion of his course.

"The manager that interviewed me said there was no way he'd give me a job because I was a scruffy sod with long hair and earrings, but there was a company setting up down the road called Imagine and maybe I'd be more suited to that. The interview there consisted of Dave Lawson saying, 'Can you write 16K of machine code in a month?' I hadn't been near a Spectrum at that point, but I said I'd give it a whirl!"

Thankfully, John hadn't bitten off more than he could chew, and after spending a fortnight learning the Spectrum's dialect of assembly, he delivered *Molar Maul* in just four weeks. The game was set in an open mouth and involved fighting off plaque with a toothbrush and paste, thus appealing to the oral hygienist in us all. "Dave Lawson was having dental treatment at the time, so the idea popped into my head," John explains. "I'd never designed a game before and I've never been very good at it. I've always left it to others who know what they're doing. Back then, cute, funny games were in vogue and it went down well, though I remember getting a dentist writing to me saying I was trivialising tooth decay. Kids wouldn't brush! Au contraire, I replied, because it shows what will happen if they don't!"

So, having cut his teeth at Imagine, John sat down with Mark Butler, Dave Lawson and Eugene Evans for a spot of blue sky thinking. The resulting game design was scribbled down on a single side of foolscap and John was sent away with the considerable technical challenge of creating a 3D flight combat simulator using the humble Z80 processor. *Zzoom* was certainly a step up, featuring multiple levels, ground and air targets and a clever little radar to alert you to aerial assaults, though it also allowed players to unleash their air rage, notes John.

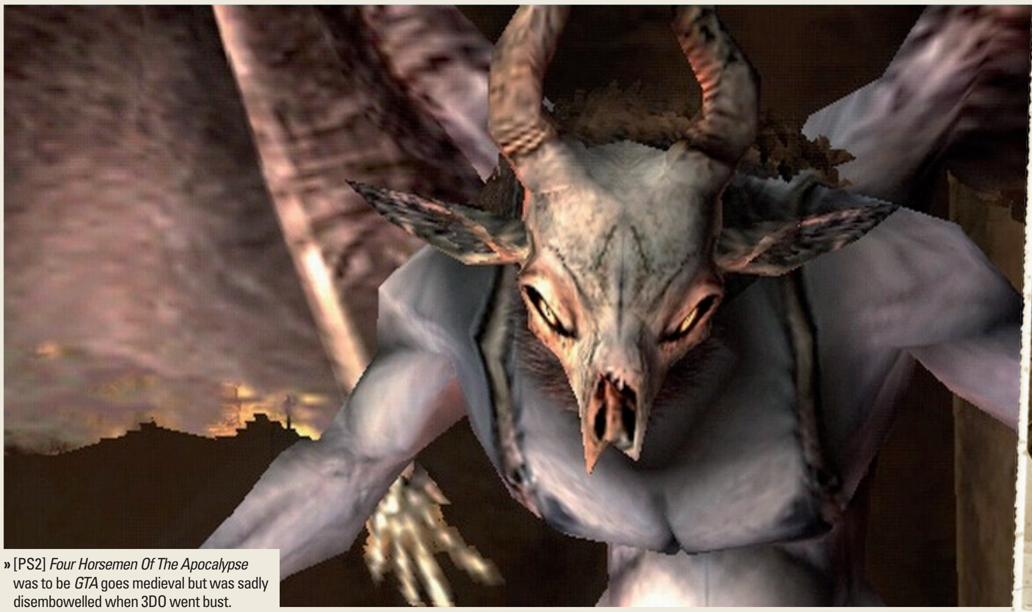
Trivia

Just before he began work on *Bandersnatch*, John converted stomping Mexploitation Spectrum title *Pedro* to the BBC Micro, a machine he describes as "a joy to work on".



Cosmic Wartoad [Spectrum] featured a gun-toting amphibian and bizarre weaponry, thanks to some prolonged herbal cigarette sessions…

DESERT ISLAND DISKS



» [PS2] *Four Horsemen Of The Apocalypse* was to be *GTA* goes medieval but was sadly disembowelled when 3DO went bust.



The Imagine boys [l–r] Dave Lawson, Eugene Evans, John, Ian Weatherburn

Imagine All The People...

"At Imagine, you went into the office for fun and did the actual work at home," laughs John, recalling the glory days of the Liverpool-based software house. "You had to do everything so quickly that you couldn't possibly do it at work. There were too many distractions. People playing games, wandering around chatting… I used to take my guitar to work and play that. You couldn't concentrate – they had this big open-plan office and loads going on. People would come in and leave when they felt like it and most would work at home. They'd do a full day's work but not necessarily during daytime hours. This bloke Jake, he was coming in later and later each day… 10am, then 11am, then the afternoon, then midnight, as the place was open 24 hours. Eventually he wrapped round and came back to early mornings."

So, as someone twice the age of many of Imagine's coders, we wonder whether John was viewed as a wise old head, a father figure even, by his youthful colleagues. "They called me granddad, if that's what you mean." Kids, eh? No respect…

"I came up with the refugees. You were supposed to protect them but if you flew too low, you could shoot them. I remember taking it into the office and all everyone did was shoot the bloody refugees. I suppose it was funny, seeing them turn red and spin up into the air. Apparently a lot of players did that – screw the planes, let's shoot the refugees!"

Casualties were to be a theme of John's third project of 1983, the strategic war game *Stonkers*. It was a brave move away from Imagine's previous cute arcade offerings and caused a considerable amount of suffering among the coding troops enlisted to get it mobilised before Christmas. "We had no fancy editors back then," sighs John. "We stuck sheets of graph paper over a wall and drew the game onto them. Each sheet cost about a tenner and had an 8x8 grid. People would shout out the hexadecimal and someone would type it into the computer. It took a week to get the map into the machine! Dave Lawson said he'd buy me a Porsche if it was ready for Christmas. I duly worked my naughty bits off, finished it in time and was presented with a scale model of a Porsche 924 by a laughing Dave Lawson. A few days later, he and I were walking between the Imagine offices when he pointed out a Porsche parked at the kerb – the full-size version of my model. He took the keys out of his pocket and said, 'It's yours'. Them were the days, mate!"

Fast cars, if not loose women, were to be the trademark of Imagine in its affluent pomp, and buoyed with cash and confidence, management boldly declared that it had pushed the Spectrum as far as it would go. So began the wildly ambitious and ultimately ill-fated *Bandersnatch* project, and John was to be the very public face of this 'megagame'. His bearded mug was often seen in Imagine's magazine adverts staring intently at a screen, accompanied by excitable claims that *Bandersnatch* would redefine the gaming experience, make all other Spectrum titles obsolete overnight and probably cure cancer. Of course, we gamers never saw what was on that screen. What made you stroke your beard so, John?

"It was an adventure, I suppose, but one that didn't end," says John. "You wandered round this planet talking to people, like a voyage of discovery. Ian Weatherburn and I were working on the actual code and Ian spent all his time working on these speech bubbles. He got quite a long way with it. When you approached someone, these bubbles would pop up and they'd say something and to reply, I think you had a few options like in *Monkey Island*. The basic game concepts were there and it was maybe half completed, but all the memory was used up! The artists like Ally [Noble] had gone bananas and done these massive great big sprites with loads of frames of animation. The hardware add-on was just 256K of ROM to store the graphics and it looked like even that was not going to be enough! Plus it was going to cost £60 or something – who the hell is going to spend that on a Spectrum game? Secretly, I was thinking that this was never going to happen…"

And, sadly, he was proved right. Imagine was haemorrhaging money at an alarming rate – John remembers that the last time anyone was paid, bosses Lawson and Butler had to go round to nearby cash machines and withdraw whatever they could to meet the payroll – and everyone realised that the company was going down the pan. [You can see it all unravel in the *Commercial Breaks* documentary on Google Video – Ed.]

Trivia

John's first published game was 1983's *Molar Maul*, which, along with Activision's *Plaque Attack*, pioneered the toothbrush simulator. The genre has sadly fallen into obscurity.

Timeline

1983

MOLAR MAUL
■ **YEAR:** 1983
■ **VERSION:** Spectrum
Fight off the DKs with your trusty brush and Imagico toothpaste. John's first game was featured in issue 1 of *Crash*.



1983

ZZOOM
■ **YEAR:** 1983
■ **VERSION:** Spectrum
Take to the sky, blast enemy planes, tanks and submarines and try to resist machine-gunning the defenceless refugees.



1984

GIFT FROM THE GODS
■ **YEAR:** 1984
■ **VERSION:** Spectrum
Born from the tragedy of *Bandersnatch*, this Greek adventure earned Denton Designs a lasting relationship with publisher Ocean.



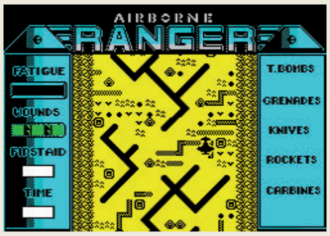
1985

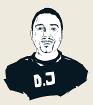
FRANKIE GOES TO HOLLYWOOD
■ **YEAR:** 1985
■ **VERSION:** Spectrum
Guide a shadowy figure from urban terrace to the Pleasuredome in this adventure.



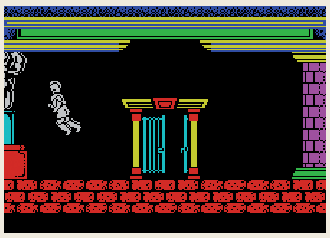
The Team On Gibson

Here's what **Retro Gamer** has to say about John's games…



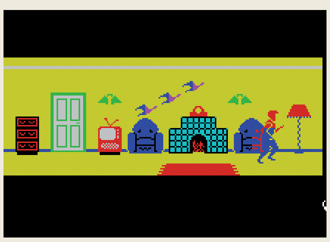


Darran Jones
Being a fan of shoot-'em-ups, most of my dabblings with Gibson come from playing *Zzoom* and *Molar Maul*. To me, though, his most impressive effort was *Airborne Ranger*, which actually predated EA's *Medal Of Honor Airborne* by a good 20 years. Oh, and *Frankie Goes To Hollywood* was pretty damn impressive as well.





Paul Drury
I remember John's bearded visage staring out from those tantalising adverts and wondering what an old bloke was doing with all those teenagers. He turned interesting ideas into reality with his clever coding. *Frankie Goes To Hollywood* and *Gift From The Gods* are both mightily impressive and, with *Stonkers*, he created his own meme.





Stuart Hunt
The thing that sticks in my head about Gibson is *Bandersnatch*. It sounded like it was going to change the world, or at least the Spectrum, but it all went tits up. After all, when you consider what he was able to achieve with games like *Frankie Goes To Hollywood* and *Gift From The Gods*, imagine what that megagame could have been like…

Well, everyone, that is, except John. He was still beavering away on *Bandersnatch* when the end came and thus was genuinely surprised to find himself perched on a toilet seat, clutching a hefty Sage IV containing his work in progress, with bailiffs peering under the door. "After a bit, someone came in and shouted, 'All clear, John and Eugene!' We ran downstairs, chucked 'em in the boot of our cars and drove off."

John finally took his foot off the accelerator when he reached Dave Lawson's house in Caldy on the Wirral. There, he regrouped with other Imagine escapees Steve Cain, Ally Noble, Karen Davies and Graham 'Kenny' Everett and initially continued working on the unfinished megagame. There was even talk of signing a contract with Atari, moving to California and completing *Bandersnatch* there, until Jack Trammiel took over at Atari and vetoed it. Frustrated with the lack of progress, it was a case of five go off and form a software house. Denton Designs was born, and its first project owed plenty to that speedy getaway from Imagine…

"*Gift From The Gods* uses the *Bandersnatch* engine – no two ways about it," admits John with a wry chuckle. "Psygnosis came out of Imagine too, and they did *Brattacus*. They saw *Gift* and threatened to sue as they owned that engine but I said, 'Nah, it's nothing like it. Brand new code.' Of course you couldn't prove anything in that respect so they dropped it, but it was! Ocean bought those Sage machines we'd been using at Imagine from the receiver for us and they had all the code on. It was just a case of changing the graphics and scaling it all down."

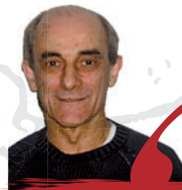
It was wholly appropriate, then, that *Crash* magazine described the innovative and stylish *Gift* as "the best thing to ever come out of Imagine". Denton continued to deliver high-quality, original gaming experiences with *Frankie Goes To Hollywood* (see **RG** 64 for the full story of its creation) and *Cosmic Wartoad*, the latter featuring stellar fish, death ray smut guns and intergalactic whisks. It sounds like the grass was much greener at Denton's, then, John?

"It was resin in them days," he corrects me. "We used to smoke in the offices and a lot of ideas came out of that. Steve said, 'Right, the hero in this game is going to be a toad!' I was like, 'You're joking. What you been taking?', but it worked! We all got on really well at Denton's. Ally and Karen brought a bit of sanity to it all. When Steve, Kenny and I were smoking ourselves to death, they were busy working and doing all the practical things, like wages and VAT returns."

Yet success brought its own challenges. The increase in demand for Denton's output meant staff needed to be recruited and soon the new employees wanted a share in the

> "Bandersnatch was going to cost £60. Who the hell is going to spend that on a Spectrum game?"

Imagine forgets the Speccy isn't a Neo Geo…



Gibson on Gibson

We asked John to pick his three favourite games from his extensive back catalogue



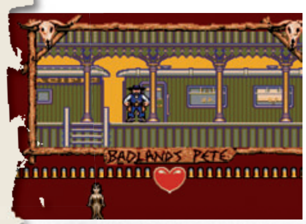
ZZOOM

I've always been amazed by the reaction it's had. I think it's because all the bits come together really nicely. I find it heartening that people see the point of the tunes out of context, listening to them not as they're playing the game.



STONKERS

I'd put that Spectrum engine aside and it was the opposite of elegant programming – it was awful but it did what it had to do. It was my first look at AI. I approached it all empirically, like if I was a general running an army, how would I make decisions? The fact that it came out all right is miraculous.



BADLANDS PETE

The pièce de résistance as far as my game engine went. I did use it again in *Wacky Stackers*, but this was the pinnacle. It achieved all the things it was supposed to achieve. I think without that engine and the tool that went with it, the game couldn't have existed.



John with his Porsche, a gift for completing Stonkers on time

1988

AIRBORNE RANGER
■ **YEAR:** 1988
■ **VERSION:** Spectrum
John was doing this solid military shooter for Canvas, until it stopped paying him and he went direct to Microprose.



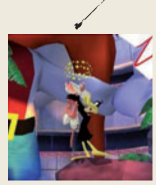
1997

SENTIENT
■ **YEAR:** 1997
■ **VERSION:** PlayStation
This ambitious attempt at a branching narrative had a pace that proved to be too sedate for the PlayStation generation.



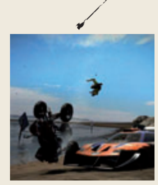
2003

LOONEY TUNES: BACK IN ACTION
■ **YEAR:** 2003
■ **VERSION:** PS2
As kids' licences go, this was better than most, with Bugs and Daffy bounding after a blue diamond.



2006

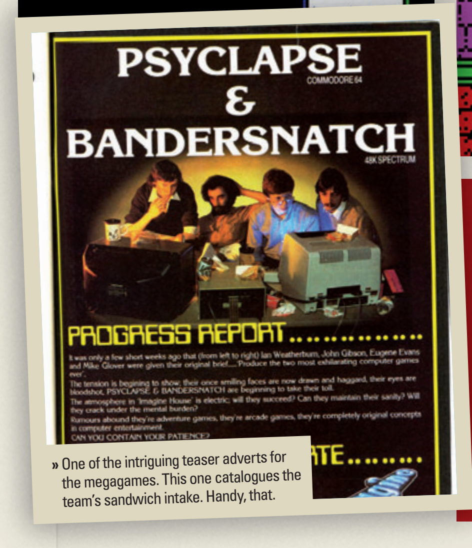
MOTORSTORM
■ **YEAR:** 2006
■ **VERSION:** PS3
The PS3's first standout exclusive continues to shine, with John currently working on an unannounced project at Evolution Studios.



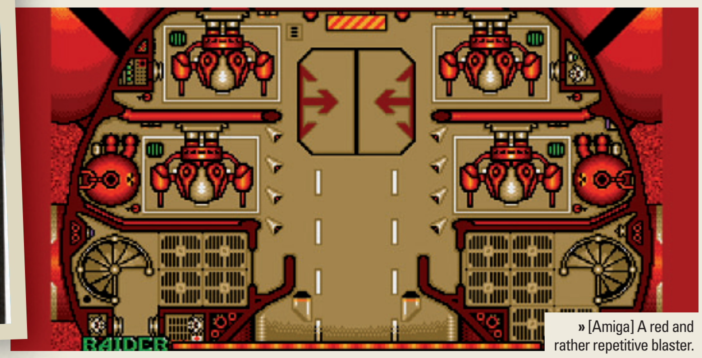


» [Spectrum] Fly high in the unfriendly skies…





» One of the intriguing teaser adverts for the megagames. This one catalogues the team's sandwich intake. Handy, that.



» [Amiga] A red and rather repetitive blaster.

company, too. "All of us except Ally said, 'No, that's not right. We've sweated blood and God knows what else to get this company going, and you're going to walk in and get the same as us – no way!' In the end, I said, 'I've had enough. If they're getting a share of the company, I'm leaving.' Also, Ocean were offering me shit loads of money…"

So John went freelance, working on such diverse titles as arcade conversion *Galivan* for Ocean and budget board game-cum-puzzler *Spaced Out*, designed with Steve Cain. One of his more successful projects was *Airborne Ranger* for Microprose, a decent military romp behind enemy lines, slightly spoiled by the necessity of reloading levels in the event of your demise. "That was a ball-ache," admits John, "but the only way you could fit it into the machine was to modify the graphics and code as you went along, which meant you couldn't reset it back to the beginning if you died. That was a limitation of the Spectrum. These days, people are spoiled rotten with memory. I had to write a whole game in what people use up in ten minutes now!"

But things were about to get easier as John moved up to the 16-bit machines. In the late Eighties, he worked on scarlet shoot-'em-up *Hellraider* and *Badlands Pete*, a Wild West adventure that he remembers with particular fondness. At the start of the Nineties, he began work on an ST project with old Ocean mucker Simon Butler, but when Atari pulled the plug on this tube-based shooter, John phoned up his former Imagine boss Ian Hetherington, who offered him a job at Psygnosis. "Fujitsu wanted us to do an original game for their new FM Towns console," he explains. "It was one of the first machines to have a CD drive, so they wanted something to show off the technology. That's why *Microcosm* has so much FMV! I was streaming it off the CD and using it as a background to put sprites over. Streaming was still relatively Mickey Mouse back then – about 300K a second – but compared to the Spectrum, it was really powerful!'

> **"We used to smoke in the Denton offices and a lot of ideas came out of that"**
>
> *B&H were stronger in the Eighties, apparently…*

It proved to be an excellent introduction to the world of modern consoles and led to John creating the CD reader and memory management system for *Sentient*, an ambitious PlayStation adventure, before working on numerous cartoon-based projects. Among the family-friendly *Looney Tunes* licences, John had a spell in sunny California, recruited by 3DO in 2002 to work on *Four Horsemen Of The Apocalypse*, the game heralded as the ailing company's salvation.

"It was like a medieval *Grand Theft Auto*," says John. "Blood, snot, sex and violence, with the main guy slicing people's heads off and blood spurting everywhere. Trip Hawkins said that's what people want – make it controversial! They shipped my whole family over there and doubled my salary… and then went bust four months later!"

John returned to Blighty and joined Evolution Studios to work on the *World Rally Championship* series and PS3 racer *MotorStorm*. "Teams are so big now that, for six years, my job has been entirely working on the online element of a game. It doesn't matter a toss what the game is. I still get up in the morning and look forward to going to work, but it's not the same as in the old days. The whole thing was yours. If it was wonderful, it was because you made it wonderful… and if it was crap it was because of you!"

After 27 years, we reckon there's been more wonders than crap, John…

Readers' Questions

The Master: Who is your favourite Doctor Who?

I've hardly ever watched it, to be honest, but who was the one with the mop of curly hair and the scarf?

Merman: Would you consider writing new games for old machines like the ZX Spectrum?

I would, actually. In fact, I've downloaded a program called ZXSpin. As well as letting you run old Spectrum games, it has a built-in assembler so you can write games. I haven't got the time these days, but I'm definitely taking that with me when I retire to Thailand. Maybe I'll rewrite some of my old games or some new ones and stick 'em on the web. I'd like to do *Gift From The Gods* again and make the maze logical so you can map it properly, and *Stonkers*, because that had a bug in. If you approached a bridge from a certain angle at a certain time of day it crashed. I'd love to be able to work out what caused that and fix it.

Matt_B: What are your memories of working with the late Ian Weatherburn?

He was a really good programmer – there's no doubt about that – but he was bitten by the glamour bug at Imagine. Fast cars and lots of money, and it was his downfall in the end. He could be difficult to get on with and had no sense of humour, but I really liked the guy and was really sad when I heard he'd killed himself. I had a little cry about that.

RichardBurton: What happened to C64 megagame *Psyclapse*?

It was almost un-started. Work began a lot later than on *Bandersnatch* and Eugene and Jake weren't really getting very far with it. I guess it was a bit like *Bandersnatch*, but they had nothing on screen. Well, I didn't ever see anything.

Northway: Could *Bandersnatch* have been done on a standard 48K Spectrum?

I think so. The actual code that you needed to drive the graphics could have been done, no problem. The extra memory was all for graphics. Like, there was a mine with a giant worm in it. You couldn't have done that in 48K – you would have taken half the memory with just that! But with a smaller worm, fewer frames… *Gift* was basically a smaller version of *Bandersnatch*.

Lanky316: What would be your personal gift from the gods?

A magic wand so I could wave it over my kids and make them four years older so they can look after themselves and I could bugger off to Thailand with the wife!

John Gibson's

Desert Island Disks

The games that John just couldn't live without and why he loves them

01 Sam & Max Hit the Road PC

I like point-and-click adventures. You can sit there and take your time. I had to have an operation back in 1993 and I was off work for about three months. I spent all that time playing *Sam & Max*. Took me that long to finish it!

02 Day Of The Tentacle PC

I remember the FMV intro. This was in the early days, about the same time as I was working on the FM Towns. That intro was just brilliant. It inspired a lot of people at Psygnosis to do similar intro movies. Not just technically good; it was so well-scripted. It summed up the game in one go.

03 The Secret Of Monkey Island AMIGA

It was funny, all the banter between the characters and the stupid names. Of these three LucasArts games, this was the one I never managed to finish. I remember ending up in a lift and you had to do something to destroy LeChuck. I never figured it out. I'd like to play it again to see if I can finish it this time!

04 Wacky Waiters VIC-20

This was written by Eugene Evans and I choose it because, with no disrespect, it demonstrates that, in those days, you could publish just about any game, however bizarre, and it would sell! Like *Molar Maul*!

05 Pong ARCADE

I used to go into a pub in Manchester when I was at university there and they had a glass-top table machine with it on. You'd put your pint down and play *Pong*. The first game I ever played and I just really enjoyed it.

06 Badlands Pete AMIGA

The only game I've written that I've ever really played. When you've written a game, you know what happens – you wrote the bloody thing! It tends to be pointless. *Badlands Pete* was an adventure and designed in such a way that it wasn't always the same. It's one I can play and enjoy, and I know I keep going on about the technical achievement, but I could sit back and say, 'Isn't it wonderful how it does this and that!'

07 Mah Jong PC

The game where you remove the matching pairs of bricks, not the actual board game. I've played it a lot over the years. The sort of game I like: a simple game, a simple challenge and you get it over and done with in a short space of time. That's what I like about *Mah Jong*. A way of killing time.

08 LittleBigPlanet PS3

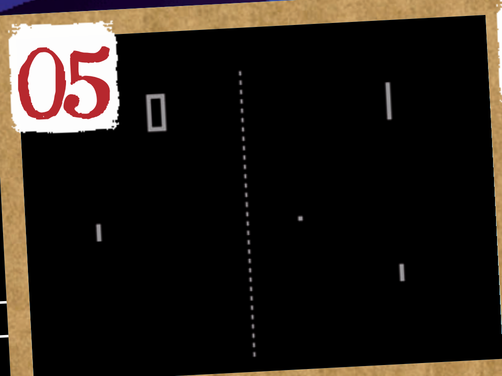
The only modern game on my list. I don't play games that often because my kids won't let me near the bloody computers, but if I can get on the PS3 at home, this is the one I play. It's fun. There's a little bit of manual dexterity involved but it's more like an adventure and I admire the technical achievement too, of course.

















THE MAKING OF…

BUBBLE GHOST

NO KILLING, NO DYING; JUST A QUIRKY, INVENTIVE LITTLE PUZZLER. DARRAN JONES SPEAKS TO CHRISTOPHE ANDRÉANI ABOUT HIS CHARMING PUZZLE GAME



Retro Gamer: So, Christophe, where did the original idea for *Bubble Ghost* come from?
Christophe Andréani: I really wanted to program a game that didn't feature any violence. I was also keen on utilising the Atari ST's mouse so that I could control a sprite with its directions and also use its two mouse buttons.

RG: What about the bubble?
CA: I just had this idea of guiding a bubble around a maze and using something to blow on it. The first idea I came up with was to use a blow dryer, but I soon discovered this idea presented quite a big problem. It just wasn't logical to have a blow dryer move through walls, as if the bubble got stuck against one there was no way for the blow dryer to blow it away. So I needed to come up with something that could logically pass through walls.

RG: Like a ghost?
CA: Exactly. Once the idea of the ghost hit me my game concept was born. A ghost can go everywhere on screen and blow on the bubble without disturbing the environment.

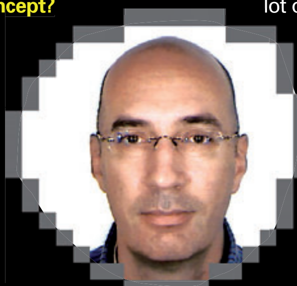
RG: So how long did *Bubble Ghost* take to create?
CA: In total I spent three months programming *Bubble Ghost*. The biggest difficulty I faced was actually creating the maze. The maze itself is a table and I had developed a system of codes to best optimise the display. *Bubble Ghost* was programmed with C and assembler languages using a Megamax C compiler. In addition to the maze, another concern was simply drawing a nice-looking ghost.

I remembered some comics that I used to read when I was young and started to draw several white ghosts until I found a look I was happy with. The ghost was quite tricky to animate, as I had to draw a cycle of different sprites for each position. I also ended up spending a fair amount of time on the bubble design. I wanted to create a bubble that looked real and was slight



and fragile, so to do that I drew a lot of sprites with very subtle changes. The end result is that, when the animation is playing, the bubble appears to be very delicate.

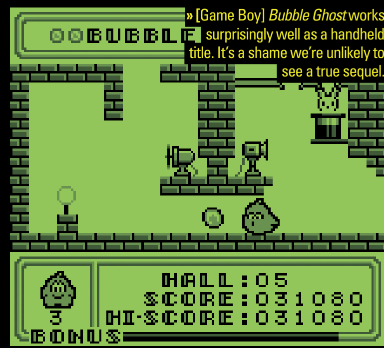
■ RG: Was it hard finding a publisher for such a unique game concept?
CA: No, but that was mainly because I already had a publisher. The very first game I programmed was *Karate* for the Oric-1. When it was finished I began looking for a suitable publisher, so, rather than send them letters, I contacted everyone by phone. Despite calling ten different publishers, only ERE Informatique asked to see me. So, I recorded my game on a music tape and I presented my game to Philippe Ulrich. He liked *Karate* so we started working together.



■ RG: So publishing *Bubble Ghost* was quite straightforward, then.
CA: Definitely. Once *Bubble Ghost* was finished I presented it to my editor and it was just a case of making a few little tweaks and ensuring that a two-player mode was included.

■ RG: So why make it on the Atari ST?
CA: Simple, really: it was my favourite computer. It was a new generation of computer with a mouse and access to a lot of colours, and I loved using it. I initially had quite a few problems when programming *Turbo GT*, but I received help from a lot of friends and was able to get the project finished. It turned out to be a good trial by fire, because when I was creating *Bubble Ghost* it was a complete pleasure to design, as I already knew what was possible on the Atari ST and how best to achieve it.

■ RG: Were you surprised by the solid reviews that *Bubble Ghost* received?
CA: Yes I was, as *Bubble Ghost* had some very nice reviews. It was certainly not a mega hit, but the reviewers appeared to like the game concept – no violence – along with the actual concept, as blowing a bubble was totally new at the time.



» [Game Boy] *Bubble Ghost* works surprisingly well as a handheld title. It's a shame we're unlikely to see a true sequel.

■ RG: Why did you pay homage to other videogames like *The Pawn*?
CA: It was just my way of showing tribute to some games that I really admired. *The Pawn* impressed me with its amazing graphics; it was so photorealistic and I'd never seen that on a computer before. It was the same with *Mercenary*.

■ RG: What do you think of the other conversions of *Bubble Ghost*?
CA: I was really impressed. The publisher would ask me for some technical notes so the teams could convert it, and that's as far as my involvement went. Despite my notes not always being accurate, the teams did great jobs.

■ RG: Did you ever attempt a sequel to the game? If so, how much progress did you make?
CA: Yes I did, but some publisher problems stopped it from actually happening. Shortly after the publishing of *Bubble Ghost*, ERE Informatique was taken over by Infogrames, who asked me to make *Bubble Ghost 2*. I began work on it and started creating some early design ideas, but Infogrames stopped sending me royalties for *Bubble Ghost* sales. As a result, I stopped work on the sequel and hired a lawyer to ensure I was paid. We eventually found an arrangement, but I've not really been programming since.



» [Atari ST] Behind *Bubble Ghost*'s bizarre imagery lies a strangely compelling title.

IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** ERE INFORMATIQUE
» **DEVELOPER:** CHRISTOPHE ANDRÉANI
» **PLATFORM:** ATARI ST, AMIGA, COMMODORE 64, SPECTRUM, AMSTRAD CPC, DOS, APPLE IIGS, GAME BOY
» **RELEASED:** 1987
» **GENRE:** PUZZLE
» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £2+



BUBBLE GHOST LIVES ON?



We asked Christophe what he thought about *Soul Bubbles*, arguably the closest we'll ever get to a *Bubble Ghost* sequel.

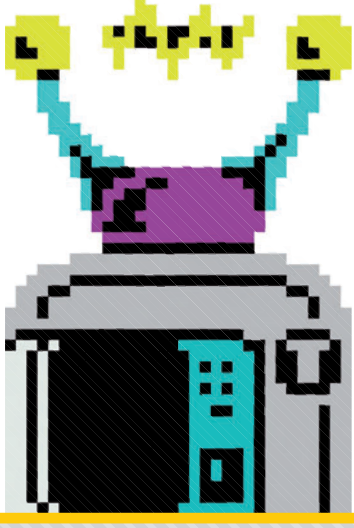
"It's a really nice game with lots of clever ideas and a few changes compared to my game. It's certainly not a copy, but it uses the same idea: blowing a bubble to guide it to a goal. In *Bubble Ghost*, when your bubble touches something it explodes, but in *Soul Bubbles* you can touch everything and the challenge actually lies elsewhere. The creators did contact me about their game and I think it's really good, but I'm happy to have been the first one to think up the concept."



STEPHEN CROW

Creator of the 8-bit classics Wizard's Lair, Starquake and Firelord, Stephen Crow is unarguably one of the most revered ZX Spectrum authors to ever lay a finger on its rubber keys. This month **Retro Gamer** caught up with the legendary programmer

IF YOU VALUED your Spectrum and enjoyed seeing it put through its paces, it's likely you're familiar with the games of Stephen Crow. Creator of some of the best-looking and quirkiest Spectrum games ever published, and cementing his status as a talented programmer by matching the mighty Ultimate Play The Game for getting the very best from the Spectrum, it's little surprise he would be voted best programmer by the readers of Crash magazine. Stuart Hunt spoke with Stephen to find out more about his legendary Spectrum past, discover the creation and inspiration behind many of his classic games, and to find out what he's been doing since relocating beneath the clement Californian sunshine.



RETRO GAMER: Can you remember the time when you started taking an interest in computer games?

STEPHEN CROW: I absolutely can. I remember very distinctly. I used to travel to school by train and it was in the very early Eighties, when I was attending grammar school, that Tonbridge railway station had just installed a *Space Invaders* cabinet. My best friend Chris used to play it on his way home in the evenings. Then a few months later the station installed a *Missile Command* cab on the side where I waited to go home and I was just hooked – it's still one of my all-time favourite games. It got to the point where my mum would make me sandwiches for lunch and I'd sell them to my classmates so I could use the money to play *Missile Command* on the way home.

RG: When was it you started to take an interest in programming?

SC: That happened shortly after I started playing *Missile Command*. One of my classmates, Gordon, who played *Missile Command* at Tonbridge station, had an Atari 2600 at the time and I used to go to his house and play things like *Space Invaders* and *Missile Command*. I remember it was about my third or fourth year at school that I decided to take computer studies. I did it for a whole term but really did not get the programming at all; it didn't click with me. Well that year my brother had gone off to university to do a degree in computer science, and when he came back at Christmas he just sat me down for an hour or two and explained how it all worked. Suddenly it just all clicked; suddenly I understood it. So after Christmas I went back to school and began writing my first games.

RG: Can you remember the first game you ever wrote?

SC: You probably won't believe this, but back then our school didn't actually have a computer. Instead we had a Teletype machine that linked to a mainframe at a local college, and you'd type in your program and it would be printed on ticker tape and you would feed the tape into the machine to load up the program. One of the first games I ever wrote was on this Teletype machine. You had this tank and this gun that you could change the angle of, and you'd try to hit the tank as it moved slowly towards you. You had to play it in rounds because the actions were typed out – it came out like a printer. So you'd see a picture of the tank, which was made up of letters, and then see your gun and where your shot went, which was displayed on the page using asterixes. I think it was probably around this time that I got a programmable calculator. I also programmed a game on that. It was based on the numbers generated by the calculator, and you would play the game on a traditional board that I created.

RG: When did you get your first taste of programming on a conventional computer?

SC: It wasn't until a little while that our school got its first computer: a Research Machines 380Z. I wrote a version of *Missile Command* in BASIC, and instead of lines it had little blocks cascading towards you, and you could move the cursor around



"The day I turned 18, Bill came over in his Porsche so that I could sign the contracts for Poppy Soft"

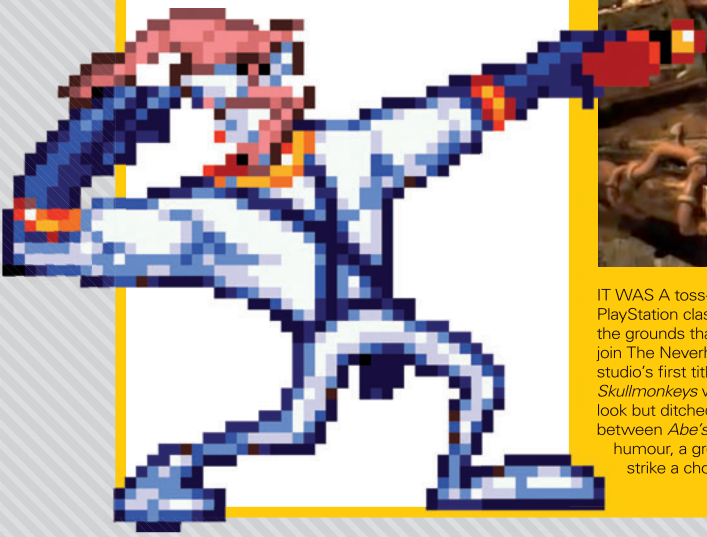
STEPHEN CROW'S TIMELINE

Laser Snaker 1984
Wizard's Lair 1985
Starquake 1985
Firelord 1985
Zynaps 1987
Savage 1988
Eliminator 1988
Turbo OutRun 1989
Mr Heli 1989
Overlord 1990
Heavy Metal 1990
Golden Axe 1990
Chase HQ II: Special Criminal Investigation 1990
Global Gladiators 1993
Disney's Aladdin 1993
Cool Spot 1993
Walt Disney's The Jungle Book 1994
Earthworm Jim 1994
Earthworm Jim Special Edition 1995
Earthworm Jim 2 1995
Skullmonkeys 1998
Boombots 1999
Metal Arms: Glitch In The System 2003
StarCraft: Ghost (indefinitely postponed)
World Of Warcraft: The Burning Crusade 2007
World Of Warcraft: Wrath Of The Lich King 2007

and shoot them, and it all happened in real-time. I remember spending every lunchtime and staying behind after school to program this thing. I seem to remember the computer had a floppy disk drive to save your stuff to and somebody made a copy of the game. People were still playing it two or three years later.

RG: What was your first home computer?

SC: Well, my dad was actually a computer engineer. He worked on mainframe computers for ICL, repairing and maintaining them, but it was a totally different thing to microcomputers. But my best friend Chris had a ZX80 and I would go round and program on that sometimes. Then one day my dad did some work for his dad, who was also in computers – he would buy and resell computer equipment. My dad tipped Chris's dad off that a company he knew was selling off some computer equipment and so as a thank you he bought us a ZX81. Once I got that I was on it all the time programming.



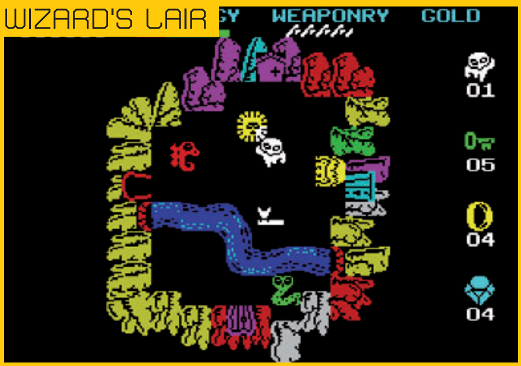
* FIVE TO PLAY

STARQUAKE



STARQUAKE WAS A sprawling cartoon platform/adventure title that wowed Spectrum owners back in the day. By the time Steve came to write the game he'd got far more proficient at the tech side of programming, having refined his skills on *Wizard's Lair*. With *Starquake*, Steve was taking the skills he'd learned and was concentrating on applying them to a game to really show off his talent as a game designer. *Starquake* was crammed with innovative ideas and great visuals, and featured a memorable central character named Blob: a droid gifted with a toolbox of quirky equipment – including the ability to poop his own platforms to gain access to higher areas, and, with the aid of special pads, the ability of flight. If you've never played *Starquake*, you're missing out on one of the best games from the microcomputer scene. It's also Steve's favourite game, and the one he'd most like to return to one day.

WIZARD'S LAIR



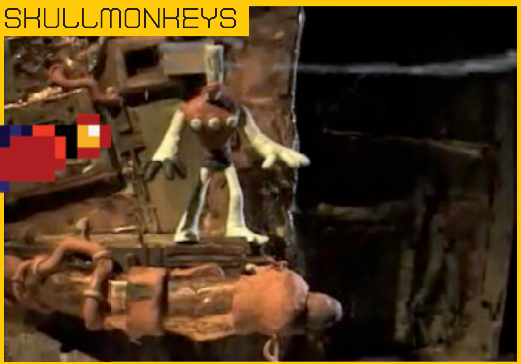
STEVE ADMITS THAT *Wizard's Lair* was his most derivative game, and if you're familiar with the games of Ultimate Play The Game – in particular *Sabre Wulf* and *Atic Atac* – you'll understand why. *Wizard's Lair* was a top-down adventure game with subtle shmup elements and mimicked aspects from both of those games. Surprisingly, Steve revealed that he did own *Sabre Wulf* but never actually owned *Atic Atac*, and had only seen pictures of it in magazines. Regardless of its imitative nature, *Wizard's Lair* was a technical marvel and a great game in its own right, boasting Steve's hallmarks of colourful graphics and smooth gameplay.

FIRELORD



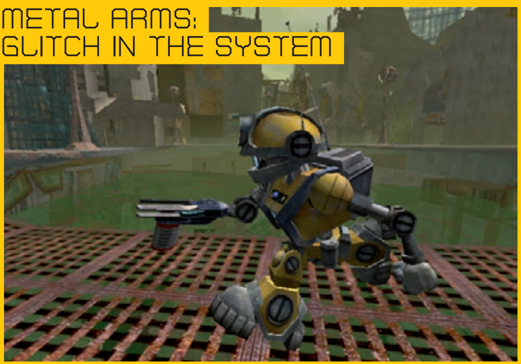
FOLLOWING THE SUCCESS of *Starquake*, publishers were anxious to snap up the rights to Steve's next game, *Firelord*. In the end, he decided to part ways with publisher Bubble Bus Software and wrote the game for Hewson Consultants instead. *Firelord* was inspired by a combination of Steve's want to create a game that had a medieval bent and the backdrop of Kent. The game found the player on a quest to save a town being terrorised by an evil witch, and employed a novel trading and shoplifting system to gain items and eke clues as well as some colourful and detailed visuals. It was also the last game for which Steve did all the programming and graphics.

SKULLMONKEYS



IT WAS A toss-up between *Earthworm Jim* and this underplayed PlayStation classic, but in the end we went with *Skullmonkeys* on the grounds that it deserves the recognition. After leaving Shiny to join The Neverhood, Steve was set to work on the sequel to the studio's first title, the claymation point-and-click game *The Neverhood*. *Skullmonkeys* was an ambitious sequel that retained that wonderful look but ditched the gameplay for a platformer that played like a cross between *Abe's Oddysee* and *Earthworm Jim*. Despite featuring quirky humour, a great visual style and excellent cut-scenes, it failed to strike a chord with PlayStation owners on its release.

METAL ARMS: GLITCH IN THE SYSTEM



LIKE *SKULLMONKEYS*, *Metal Arms: Glitch In The System* was another game that didn't reach the audience it deserved. Working for the developer Swingin' Ape Games, which was later acquired by Blizzard, following the closure of The Neverhood, Steve helped to create this innovative third-person Xbox and GameCube sci-fi shooter. With a great visual style, a rich game world, a legion of characters and a fantastic combat system made up of some truly excellent artillery, *Metal Arms* is a wonderfully crafted game with characters that hark back brilliantly to Steve's early Spectrum videogames, so it is a must for any Stephen Crow fan.

RG: When you were playing more games and programming from home, were there any games that really inspired you?

SC: There was one game, a *Defender*-type game, and I can't remember the name of the company who made it but somehow they took out the screen syncing. So instead of displaying everything on a grid, they did something that took over the screen display and displayed things smoothly. So I was playing those games, thinking they were amazing, while at the same time programming in BASIC and making games that weren't as smooth.

RG: Your first published game was *Laser Snaker*. Can you tell us a little about the inspiration behind this game?

SC: Well, I was playing lots of games and looking at games in magazines and as I was only a kid at school and wasn't able to buy all of these games, sometimes I would just see pictures of games in magazines, not really understanding how they worked, but just base a game I was writing on those. After I had the ZX81, I started programming games in BASIC and use a BASIC compiler to compile it into machine code, and that would help it run much faster. I then got a ZX Spectrum and a compiler for that. The smoothness and the speed of *Laser Snaker* came from the fact that I'd written it in BASIC and had compiled it into machine code.

RG: Both *Laser Snaker* and *Factory Breakout* were published by Poppy Soft. Can you tell us about this relationship?

SC: I had a friend at school, Justin, and we were both into writing games. He actually went off and got a job from Atari. He had an Atari 800 and wrote a game called *The Lone Raider*, and then he did a conversion of *Dig Dug*, I think for the BBC. Well his dad wanted to set us both up in a company to do games. When I got the terms of the agreement my dad asked a friend at his golf club, a guy called Bill Laker, to take a look at the agreement. He basically looked at it and said it wasn't a fair arrangement. As it stood, I got 49 per cent of the deal and they would get 51 per cent, and basically in a company once you have a commanding share of 51 per cent you can do what you want. Well this guy had a computer software business called Gandlake and said, 'I'll go in with your son and we'll do it fairly. I'll pay for all the publishing of the games and he writes the games,' and that's how we set up Poppy Soft.

RG: Were you still at school at the time you set up Poppy Soft?

SC: When I wrote *Laser Snaker*, I was 17 and in my second to last year at school. I remember the day I turned 18, Bill came over on my birthday so that I could sign the contracts for Poppy Soft. He came over in his Porsche, and he had all this paperwork to sign. It was totally fair; he and his business partner were so straight and fair with me. At the same time I went back to school, for my last year, and after a few weeks decided to leave to concentrate on games. So I left education and instead wrote videogames full time. I went to a local school in my town and finished up my last year at school as an adult student. That way all I had to do was go to the classes I had to and then I could go home and spend as much time programming as possible.

RG: Where did the idea for *Factory Breakout* come from?



» Steve proudly shows off his new son, who was born just four days after our interview, and shows him the ropes on *Mario Kart 64*.

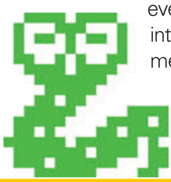
> " I'd sell my lunch to friends to play Missile Command "

SC: The little robot guy was sort of influenced a bit by the Dalek in *Doctor Who*. The gameplay is split into three stages and one of the ideas was influenced from my friend that had written that *Lone Raider* game. He'd done a maze-style game where you were sucked through little doors, and to go up and down I added more to the idea with the use of elevators and gravity. The first stage where you're a big circular head and you spin round shooting little lines coming in from the side was taken from *Missile Command*. I remember I was just walking to the railway station one day and I had this idea with these lines coming in from all around and you were in the middle, shooting at them.

RG: Your games always scored highly in the press. Did you ever read the reviews of your games at the time?

SC: I remember *Factory Breakout* received a *Crash* Smash. And I think it got that review before we'd even got the game manufactured. Once Bill Laker found out, he approach WHSmith and other retailers and convinced them to order copies we hadn't even manufactured yet. I think it sold around 6,000 to 10,000 units in the end, which was really good considering, because I think *Laser Snaker* only sold about 1,000. It was very important to get that review because it was a turning point for my career.

RG: How did you feel reading that review, and receiving a *Crash* Smash?



SC: I was totally blown away. When you're creating something you really don't know how it's going to be received. My personal way of working is I try to make something as good as I can make it, and something I would enjoy playing. I want it to be fun, I want it to look great, and I want it to satisfy me. So when I created *Factory Breakout* and somebody liked it and wrote positive things about it, I was blown away.

RG: Can you tell us about how it was you came to write games for Bubble Bus Software?

SC: Well Bill thought he was going to make millions doing games and if he'd stuck with it he probably would have. But at the time he thought that games were just a fad and were going to die off, and so decided they were taking the focus away from his main business and so gave me some money and the rights to the games back. At that time I was writing *Wizard's Lair* and was left to look for someone to publish the game. I shipped that game around to everyone and no one was really interested. Thorn EMI offered me £1,000 for the total rights to the game, and at that time I just thought having spent an entire year writing

it there was no way I was going to sell it for £1,000. In the end I decided that instead I'd give it to *Crash* magazine to put on their cover and distribute it to all their readers. But at the same time I also approached one publisher in my hometown of Tonbridge called Bubble Bus, and they were much more humble. They were just trying to make it as a publisher and were really nice, so I decided to go with them.

RG: A lot of your games, *Wizard's Lair* in particular, share a lot of similarities with Ultimate Play The Game titles. Were their games a big influence to you?

SC: Well, I never actually bought a copy of *Atic Atac*, but that's where I got the idea for *Wizard's Lair* from. I saw this top-down maze idea in a magazine and I went with it. I thought Ultimate games were the best ever, and the pinnacle of Spectrum games at the time, so obviously I was very heavily influenced by their games. But actually I never owned *Atic Atac*, but I think I owned *Sabre Wulf*. I sort of combined the two games together and created *Wizard's Lair* from that, so it was very derivative, let's say.

RG: Were there any other inspirations behind *Wizard's Lair* besides *Atic Atac* and *Sabre Wulf*?

SC: It was basically just a culmination of ideas that I wanted to see in a game, but it was certainly my most derivative game. I think also, with *Wizard's Lair*, I was really trying to develop the technology to do large map games on the Spectrum in the limited amount of memory. So it was less creative but more technical. I had gone from doing a game like *Factory Breakout*, which was pretty simple, to this complicated game that had hundreds of screens. I spent a lot of my efforts just trying to get the technology to work and improving the speed of the sprites. That was the key thing in Spectrum games: your sprite routine. I'd spend weeks trying to get it as fast as possible.

RG: Of all your games, *Starquake* is our favourite. Can you tell us a little about its design?

SC: It's actually my favourite game too. With *Wizard's Lair*, I was trying to get the technology down, and by the time I came to do *Starquake* I had gotten much better at that side of things, so I was thinking more about the game. So what I did – and I believe this is key for any game that requires high-speed gameplay – is start off with the main character and get him working properly. So I started off with the little robot called Blob and came up with his round body with funny little legs, then I got the jumping down, and then I started creating this little kit for him, and a small playground, maybe just two screens, for him to play in. The elevators were taken from *Factory Breakout*. I liked how they worked in that game and so I wanted to incorporate them into *Starquake*, but this time I had the main character going behind the tubes so it looked like he was actually inside. The platform-laying was partly influenced by another game that had something similar in it and then I came up with the idea that Blob could only have so much time to use them before they dissolved. I also wanted some way that Blob could fly and get around a bit easier, which led to the rocket pads. But whenever you add a feature to a game you have to be careful. It's easy to add a powerful feature to your game that can destroy the whole gameplay. So I came up with the idea that you could use rocket pads to fly around, but could only land them on another pad, so it really controlled what you can do. I honestly believe that a lot of the stuff we were doing in the Eighties were basic fundamental gameplay ideals that ring true today.



RG: Is the rumour true that an Amiga version of *Starquake* was planned but never released?

SC: There probably was, you know, because as soon as Bubble Bus knew *Starquake* was going to be a success, they planned a number of conversions. They did conversions for the C64 and the Amstrad and I think they were planning a conversion for the PC and Amiga but never got round to doing it. I just can't remember. I did some work on the Amstrad and C64 versions. I wrote the music drivers, some of the other bits and pieces, and just generally assisted the programmers who were working on the games.

RG: There were never any sequels to your games. Why was that?

SC: I would have loved to have written a sequel for *Starquake*, and maybe one day I will, but I hadn't really considered it at the time. Basically I was approached by Hewson Consultants and a couple of other companies for my next game, *Firelord*. Bubble Bus were really nice people but I was always a bit miffed that they would put the same amount of money into promoting *Starquake* as one of their other products, some of which you could tell straight away weren't great games. It would really irritate me because I would put my heart and soul into the games to program them. So when Hewson approached me it was a bit of a struggle to decide which way to go because Bubble Bus had been good to me, but in the end I decided to go with Hewson.

RG: What was working for Hewson Consultants like?

SC: It wasn't the happiest of times when I was at Hewson doing games

> "Bubble Bus were trying to make it as a publisher and were nice, so I went with them"



[Xbox] *Metal Arms* was a great third-person shooter that sadly didn't get the recognition it deserved. Track it down if you can.

*NUMBER CRUNCHING

Steve was offered **£1,000** for Wizard's Lair by Thorn EMI, but he turned it down and offered the publishing rights to Bubble Bus Software instead

The first computer Steve ever touched was a Research Machines **380Z**, after his school purchased one

Missile Command, released in **1980**, is one of Steve's favourite games

There are **3** different stages in Factory Breakout, which was Steve's second published game

Poppy Soft offered a cash reward of **£100** to the first person to complete Laser Snaker and answer two questions. The game sold for **£5.95**, making you a potential profit of **£94.05**

Starquake was awarded **96%** and a Crash Smash in issue **22** of Crash magazine

Boasting **512** screens, Starquake was one of the largest games on the Spectrum



» [Spectrum] A colourful Speccy classic and Steve's favourite game.

for them, or at least writing my own games for them. I remember Andrew Hewson calling me up and threatening me because *Firelord* was running a week late on schedule. I had sort of a bad experience with *Firelord* and so I was a little burned out after that, and it was actually the last game I programmed and did everything for. I did start work on a game that was based on *Starquake* after *Firelord*. It was more advanced than *Starquake* and it had a similar little Blob-type character that did even more cool things. It would have been like *Starquake 2*, but I never finished it. In the end I started working on graphics for games Hewson were working on.

RG: So was *Firelord* the reason behind your decision to leave programming behind and concentrate on graphics?

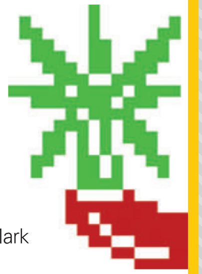
SC: I think the reason behind it was that it was getting to the point where games were getting more sophisticated, and it was becoming obvious that there were starting to be pairs of people, like a graphic artist and a programmer, teaming up to do games. It was becoming harder to do everything on your own, like to write the music, to do the programming and the artwork and be at the top of your game on all three of those, and I really liked the idea of being able to do everything. As I said, I was also burned out after finishing *Firelord* and so when Hewson asked me if I wanted to do some graphics for this game, I said sure. So I kind of fell into it a little, but it was sort of both of those things: the realisation that you couldn't do everything on your own any more and the thought that maybe I needed a break from programming before writing the follow-up to *Firelord*. I thought I'd come back to it, but I never did.

RG: Do you feel the hardware of the Spectrum was ever maxed out?

SC: I think we could have still pushed it a little more. When you see the things Ultimate Play The Game did with games such as *Knight Lore*, I think that was probably pushing it to its limit. I think I could have pushed it a little bit further with the games I did, though. I think the main problem with those machines, in hindsight, was the lack of memory. You could make routines go faster and do more sophisticated things, but it required more memory.

RG: After working for Hewson you then joined Probe Software. How did that come about?

SC: I think Fergus McGovern, the owner of Probe, just called me up one day and asked if I wanted to do some graphics for one of their games. I started working with Mark Kelly on a game, and we sort of formed a partnership at Probe Software. We did *Mr Heli*, *Turbo OutRun* and lots of other games on the C64, and eventually worked on a game called *Overlord* [aka *Supremacy*], which was our first Nintendo game. Mark had realised that Nintendo was huge in America and was the next big wave, so really pushed Fergus to get us to work on a Nintendo game. Fergus wanted us to convert *Overlord*, which was one of Nick Bruty and David Perry's games, to the NES, and he got it published through Virgin Games. But Mark actually fell out with Fergus during its development. He called me up one day and told me he was quitting and we both left Probe and decided to go get work at another company.



RG: How did you eventually come to the attention of Virgin Games?

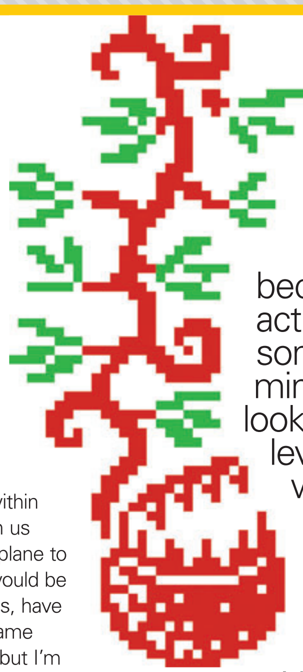
SC: One day Martin Alper from Virgin Games came over from the States and Mark told him he'd quit and Martin basically asked us to come over to America and finish the game over there. Mark called me up and said Virgin wanted us to go to America, and literally within less than a month from us quitting we were on a plane to California. I thought I would be out there for six months, have some fun, finish this game and then come home, but I'm still here.

RG: How did some of you former Probe guys end up working for Virgin Games in America?

SC: Basically Virgin Games was starting to really grow at the time, and they realised that the British programmers and artists were really quite talented because we'd been working all the way through the Eighties on Spectrum and C64 games. Martin Alper was British and knew about us guys and so would approach people like Mark or myself and ask if we knew anyone back home in England we recommend they hire. And once those people came across, like David Perry, they probably gave recommendations to people they knew back in England.

RG: Why did some of you guys at Virgin decide to tier off and form Shiny Entertainment?

SC: Well I'd been working with Mark Kelly and we'd worked on every project together at Virgin Games, but some of the people underneath Martin Alper, some of the middle management people they'd hired, were really out of touch. I remember once they were offered the *Power Rangers* licence and they turned it down. They showed us the pilot of the first show and middle management just didn't get it. So I was starting to get a bit dissatisfied at Virgin and the project I was working on. Dave and I worked together on *Aladdin* and he was completely fed up with the management team at Virgin too and wanted to do his own thing. I think he was going to get set up with a studio by Virgin but they sort of all fell out and in the end he set up his own company.



RG: How soon were you approached to work for Shiny?

SC: I wasn't approached immediately because they actually had someone else in mind. Shiny was looking for two level artists that would do all the graphics and level design for their games and they had Nick Bruty, who had always been really close friends with Dave, and another guy called Christian Larsen. But right at the last minute Christian backed out to set up his own company. The decision to move across to Shiny was a difficult one because I sort of fell out with Mark Kelly over it. We had been working together for several years and he felt it was a bit of a stab in the back. But I felt it was the right move for me to make, and that's when I began working on *Earthworm Jim*.

> "Virgin realised that British programmers and artists were really quite talented"

RG: What elements in the *Earthworm Jim* games did you work on?

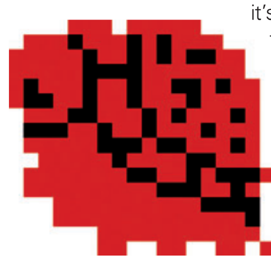
SC: For *Earthworm Jim 1* and *2*, Nick Bruty and I would take a level each. Basically I handled all the graphics for a level and all the game design – you know, the placement of objects and how far it was to jump from one thing to another. Obviously there was input from everyone in the company, but it was my entire responsibility. And it was nice because we got to do whole levels ourselves.

RG: We've always wondered why some of you decided to leave Shiny Entertainment and form The Neverhoood at a time when it was doing so well…

SC: Well we were working on *Earthworm Jim 2* [at the time]. We went to E3 that year and the first day of the show on the front cover of the business section of the *LA Times* it said that Shiny had been bought by Interplay. That was the first any of us at the company knew. Dave had kept it completely under wraps. I started three or four months after the initial company setup but some of the guys were really ticked off because to move over to Shiny some of them had stuck their necks out and taken huge risks. So that's why people left and formed their own company.

RG: When was it that you left Shiny to join The Neverhood?

SC: Well I stayed at Shiny for another year after that. After that whole thing went down some guys left and then Nick Bruty said he wanted to do his own game and manage it himself with no interference. So he did *MDK* with a whole bunch of other guys who had come over from Virgin, while we were working on another game that Dave was in charge of, and it wasn't going very well. After about a year the guys over at the The Neverhood asked us if I wanted to work for them, and I did because a lot of them were my friends and I got on with them really well. And that's when I left Shiny.



RG: What games did you work on for The Neverhood?

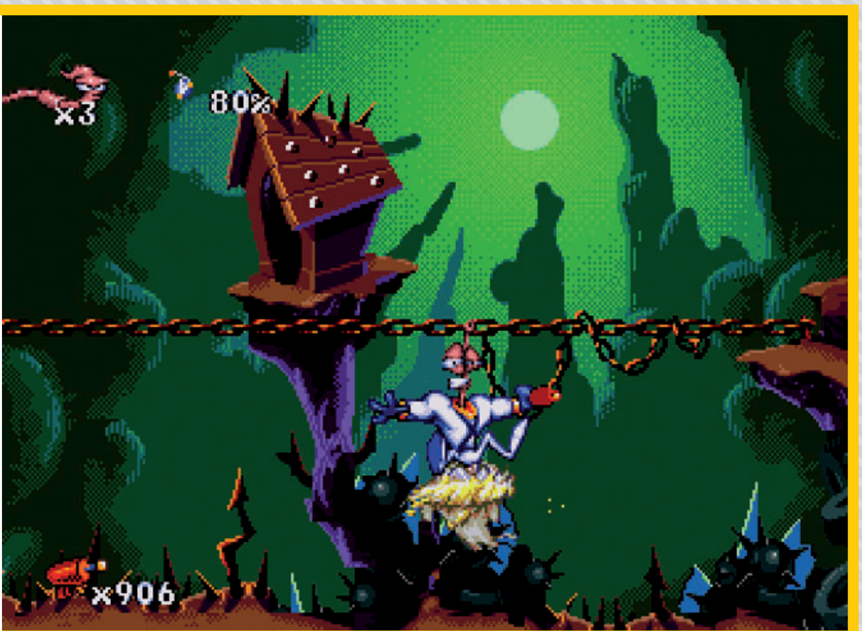
SC: For The Neverhood I did the game called *Skullmonkeys*, which was a platform-based game, and then I did the 3D fighting game *Boombots*. But what happened towards the end of The Neverhood was Doug TenNapel [the artist who created the Earthworm Jim character] became more interested in making movies and getting into Hollywood, and Mike Dietz wanted to do more in the field of cartoons and animation. They just kind of got tired of doing videogames, and one day said they we're going to wrap the company up after our last game was finished. It was a bit disappointing, but then some of us decided we wanted to keep making games and so we set up a company called Monkeytropolis, of which I was one of the owners.

RG: What projects did you work on at Monkeytropolis?

SC: We started working on a snowboarding game for Activision but they pulled the plug after about a year, and then we started work on a game for Sony for the superhero Flash. They liked our demo, but in the end it was around the time that the *Spider-Man* movie came out and Marvel Comics turned round to Sony and was asking for more money for the licence, and so they decided not to go ahead with it. After that we disbanded Monkeytropolis and within a couple of weeks I was approached by another small developer here in Orange County that had just started up called Swingin' Ape Studios. I worked for them on a game called *Metal Arms: Glitch In The System* – an awesome game that didn't sell as well as it should have. And then eventually the company got acquired by Blizzard. They got us working on a game for them called *StarCraft: Ghost*, and then halfway through its development said they were buying the company, and that's how I became a Blizzard employee.

RG: Finally, what do you miss most about the golden age of coding?

SC: What I miss is just how individual people, or just a couple of people, would get together and have this idea and didn't have to worry about marketing or whether it would sell. I think we're starting to see much more of that now with the advent of the iPhone and Xbox Live, and I think it's even spilling back into the mainstream where developers are getting more creative. Earlier we were talking about the quirkiness I used to put into my games, and I miss that, but I feel that it's coming back.



[Mega Drive] Steve worked as a level designer on both *Earthworm Jim* games.



Steve now works on the *World Of Warcraft* series for Blizzard. It issues staff with one of these fancy letter openers.

YOU ASK THE QUESTIONS

We were inundated with questions for Stephen and he kindly visited our forum to answer some of them.

Where did you get the idea for *Firelord*?
I lived in Kent and a lot of the idea for *Firelord* came from just seeing all the timber frame buildings as I cycled through the little villages. I always thought they just looked really cool and had this medieval feel to them. Just that whole visual really inspired me. I decided I wanted to base a game on that.

***Metal Arms: Glitch In The System* was a superb game. Is there any chance of a sequel?**
I don't think so now. To be honest with you, I was very disappointed when we started work on *StarCraft: Ghost* for Blizzard, as we had developed so many brilliant ideas in *Metal Arms*, and for some reason we didn't develop those ideas further in *Ghost*, which was a very similar type of game. It was almost like we threw everything out. I don't think there will ever be a follow-up to that because all the people who worked on that game now work at Blizzard, just about, and it's not a Blizzard franchise.

Did you ever feel guilty about encouraging kids to steal stuff in *Firelord*?
No. I think what's good about that is that if you did get caught you got punished. It's one of those moral elements, and I think it's good in games to have things like that.



Which of your games would you most like to remake and why?
Starquake, definitely. If I won the lottery tomorrow and I could just sit at home and do my own thing, I would probably write a follow-up to *Starquake* on the iPhone.

When you were making *Wizard's Lair*, why did you make the perspective of the wizard top-down but the enemies side-on?
That's a really good point. [laughs] I think because back then you could get away with things like that. Back then, if I had made all the enemy characters top-down, it would have been hard to see what they were with the limited graphics of the Speccy, but by doing them side-profile you could see it was a certain type of monster.



Was it true that there was, at one time, a two-player version of *Golden Axe* on the C64 that never found a release?
I do believe at one point we [Mark Kelly] did have it working in two-player, but maybe we had to take it out at the end because we were having too much to be drawn on the screen. I would probably think Mark at least played around with the idea of having two-player working and then it might have just been taken out because it just wasn't feasible.

GREENDOG: THE BEACHED SURFER DUDE!

YOU ARE ONE RADICAL SON OF A BEACH BUM!



- **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- **RELEASED:** 1992
- **GENRE:** PLATFORM
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** MEGA DRIVE
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £5



HISTORY

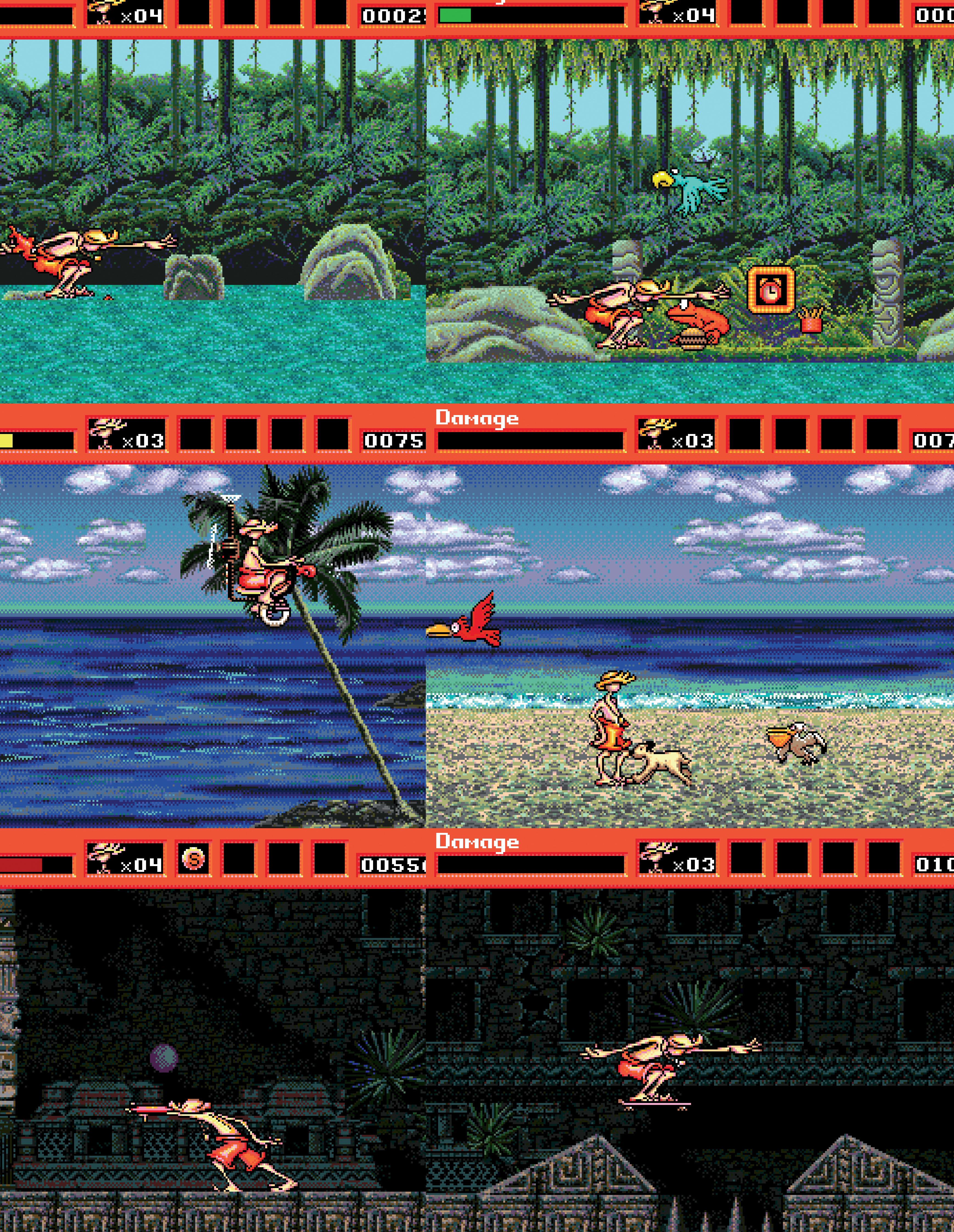
In Sega's ambition to secure mascots, it went about the job with the same level of uncertainty as Henry VIII picking wives. A creation by Sega Technical Institute, Greendog was a videogame spin on Fido Dido, the crudely drawn surfer dude used to promote 7 Up. But unlike Fido, Sega's surfer had no discerning facial features, which was probably why he became a low-key entrant in the world of Sega mascots.

After wiping out on a tsunami, our titular hero awakens on a strange tropical island, wearing a mysterious gold pendant and with his arms and legs splayed out in front of a pretty girl in a bikini. Speaking to the girl, Greendog discovers that the pendant is cursed, and in order to lift the spell he must reclaim several pieces of Aztec gold that have been strewn across the Caribbean. Greendog, being a typical surfer stereotype, takes this news in his stride and embarks on his mission with all the urgency of someone popping down the shops to buy new insoles.

If we had to liken *Greendog*'s gameplay to another game, we would have to say it's basically *Pitfall*, as it finds the player running, jumping and swinging around several jungle-themed stages. Armed with a Frisbee, 'Dog uses the device as a means to open up pathways through the level and knock out enemies, which seem to comprise mainly of narked animals. In addition to the combat, on certain levels Greendog gets to use his skateboard, gyrocopter and rollerblades to get around, adding variety to the game.

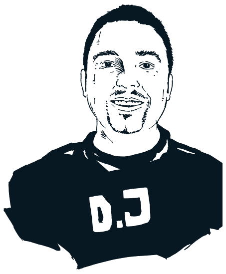
Like our hero, the game itself has this serene and sedate feel to it, and the gameplay is actually pretty easy. However, we found the fact that we could chill out and take everything the game threw at us to be part of its charm. There was a vast number of platform games during the 16-bit era, but we reckon that this is one of the better offerings to find release. You might be able to finish it without breaking a sweat, but it's one of the best Sunday afternoon hangover games ever released.





x04
x04
Damage
x03
0075
x03
Damage
x04
x03

» NEW SUPER MARIO BROS WII



» It's always a big deal when a new Mario game comes along, and New Super Mario Bros Wii has split opinions among the team. Aside from that, Alien Breed returns, and there's even a new Dreamcast game to check out. Enjoy.



» [Wii] The visuals are simple but work extremely well. They also remind us of *Super Mario World*.



✱ GO DEEPER

The facts behind New Super Mario Bros Wii

- » Super Guide – where Luigi completes hard sections for you – is only activated if you've failed a stage at least eight times
- » Two multiplayer modes are included: Free Mode and Coin Battle. They're a surprising amount of fun
- » The third and fourth players take on the form of blue and yellow toads



» [Wii] If you're not playing the game properly, messing about with three other players is quite a laugh.

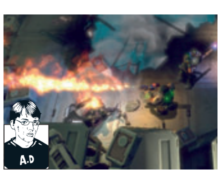
✱ PICKS OF THE MONTH



DARRAN
Rush Rush Rally Racing
It's Micro Machines but it's on Sega's Dreamcast. What's not to like?



STUART
Jambo Safari
Loved the arcade game and this is a pretty decent, if a little pre-school in feel, conversion.



ASHLEY
Alien Breed Evolution
I've waited 13 years for this comeback and I'm not disappointed. Roll on *Episode 2*.

New Super Mario Bros Wii

TWO TOADS TOO MANY

INFORMATION

- » **FEATURED SYSTEM:** WII
- » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A
- » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- » **PRICE:** £44.99
- » **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- » **PLAYERS:** 1-4

BRIEF HISTORY

» Mario made his first appearance in *Donkey Kong* as Jumpman. Since then, the talented plumber has gone on to star in a multitude of scrolling platformers, has become Nintendo's mascot and is easily the most recognisable videogame character on the planet. Not bad for a person whose first name is the same as his second.

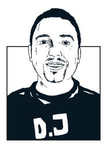
✱ WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD
WORLD OF ILLUSION (MEGA DRIVE)



▽ SOMETHING NEW
LITTLEBIGPLANET (PS3)





If Mario's latest adventure proves one thing, it's that even Nintendo's mighty plumber isn't infallible. While he's dabbled in multiplayer shenanigans in the past – *Mario Bros, Super Mario 64 DS* – this is his first 'proper' multiplayer adventure.

With its bright, recognisable visuals, catchy tunes and numerous power-ups, *New Super Mario Bros Wii* initially appears to be every bit as good as its little DS brother. Level design is tight and focused, there's plenty of variety throughout the huge game worlds, and boss fights are challenging but never impossible.

Yup. Play *NSMBW* on your own and you'll instantly be transported to a happier time when all the best games were in 2D. It's when you start playing Mario's latest adventure with friends that the cracks begin to appear…

Play with a friend of equal skill and you'll find *NSMBW* to be a hell of a lot of fun. Although your score, lives, coins and power-ups are all shared, that still won't stop you from using every dirty trick in the book to nab every item before your mate does. Using Koopa shells to knock our opponent down a size level or jumping so high that he'd fall off the bottom of the screen are just a few of the deliciously evil things you can do, and the end result is some of the best multiplayer fun that you can have on Nintendo's console.

Once you start reaching the later levels or are joined by three players, however, Mario's new adventure starts to fall apart. It immediately becomes obvious that *NSMBW* is first and foremost a single-player game. Later levels, particularly the scrolling ones, are incredibly tough to get through with just two players, let alone four, and while bouncing off each other is fun when you're scrabbling around for coins, it soon becomes infuriating when another collision has one of you falling to your death. It's certainly a nice concept, but any sequel is going to need a hell of a lot of work.

OPINION



It's easy to write this one off as a rehash of the old DS game, but closer examination reveals an all-new *Mario* platform game with plenty to offer. There are loads of new power-ups, but the all-new multiplayer mode is the real reason to get excited. Great game.

Ashley Day

In a nutshell

Mario's new Wii game works brilliantly as a single-player experience, but Nintendo's insistence on making this a title for the family has actually tarnished the plumber's good name. What a pity.

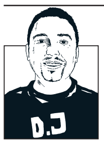
» Scores

Presentation	75%
Graphics	88%
Sound	80%
Playability	82%
Addictivity	70%
Overall	**74%**

Gravity Crash

THRUST, BUT AS YOU'VE NEVER SEEN IT BEFORE

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** PSN » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
» **PRICE:** £6.29 » **PUBLISHER:** SCEE » **DEVELOPER:** JUST ADD WATER » **PLAYERS:** 1-4



***Gravity Crash* is pure old-school gaming. As well as looking deliciously retro with its ridiculously slick vector visuals and stark presentation, it's also exceedingly hard. Not insanely so, but you'll certainly fling a few swear words about while you're playing.**

And yet, for all its toughness, *Gravity Crash* proves itself to be one hell of an addictive game and a title that's very difficult to put down. This is mainly because developer Just Add Water has achieved some truly superb physics that will see you battling just as much against the gravity of each world as you will against the monsters and enemy craft that inhabit it.

While early missions require you to do little more than shoot or collect specific items and reach the end of the level, later stages become challenging thanks to deviously placed enemies, tricky terrain and hard to reach pilots.

The controls are simple but effective, and it's possible to change from a simple twin-stick setup to one that mimics the original *Thrust*. Yes, it takes a while to get used to *Gravity Crash*'s physics, and you'll constantly find yourself smashing into atoms as you once again career into a wall or enemy craft, especially early on, but you'll still return for more. Even when you've completed all of *Gravity Crash*'s tricky stages you've not reached its end, as you can indulge in its excellent level editor – all the included levels were designed with it, and your creations can be shared – and entertaining multiplayer modes. Highly recommended.

» Scores

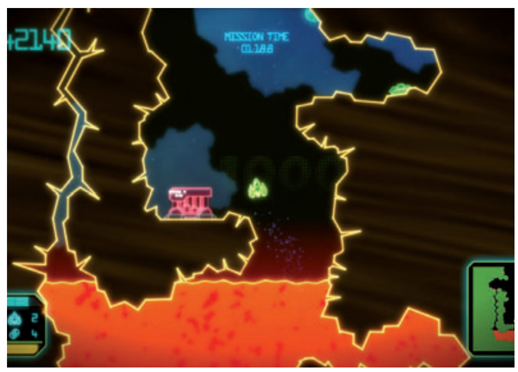
Presentation	88%
Graphics	90%
Sound	90%
Playability	86%
Addictivity	87%

Overall 89%



PSN

» [PSN] There's plenty going on in *Gravity Crash*, so you'll need your wits about you.



OPINION



I'm not quite as enamoured with this as Darran is, mainly because it's just a little too tough to get to grips with. The level editor is impressive, however, as is the ability to upload them for other people to play. I just wish it was a little easier.

Stuart Hunt



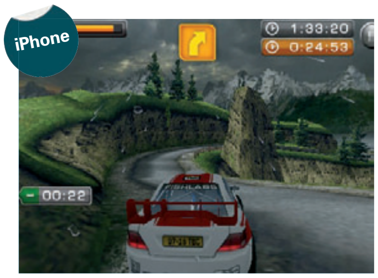
PSP

Jak & Daxter: The Lost Frontier

» **SYSTEM:** PSP
» **PRICE:** £24.99 » **PLAYERS:** 1

» **It would appear** that the PSP is having a platformer resurgence at the moment. While this latest *Jak & Daxter* isn't up to the standards of last month's *LittleBigPlanet* – there's too much clunky shooting, for one thing – it remains a slick platformer that should go down well with anyone who loved the PS2 original or Daxter's solo quest.

» Score **70%**



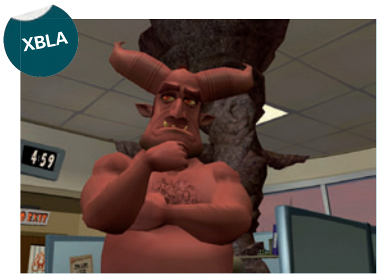
iPhone

Rally Master Pro 3D

» **SYSTEM:** iPHONE/iPOD TOUCH
» **PRICE:** £2.99 » **PLAYERS:** 2

» **It's not quite** *Sega Rally*, but this is arguably the next best thing for iPhone owners. *Rally Master Pro 3D* not only looks this business thanks to its slick visuals and solid game engine but also comes with a variety of excellent gameplay modes. Best of all, both the accelerometer and the on-screen digital controls work brilliantly. The lack of multiplayer annoys, but this is still impressive stuff.

» Score **86%**



XBLA

Sam & Max Beyond Time And Space

» **SYSTEM:** XBOX LIVE ARCADE
» **PRICE:** 1,600 POINTS » **PLAYERS:** 1

» **Hooray! The dog** detective and his demented bunny sidekick are back and trying to solve yet another crazy plot, this time involving Santa Claus and Beelzebub. The controls feel a little clunky and the humour isn't quite as sharp as the others, but this is still decent value that fans of both the characters and genre will lap up.

» Score **82%**



VC

Super Empire Strikes Back

» **SYSTEM:** VIRTUAL CONSOLE
» **PRICE:** 800 POINTS » **PLAYERS:** 1

» **If there's one** thing we'll say about *Super Empire Strikes Back*, it's that it looks fantastic. Slick animation, huge bosses and clever use of Mode 7 all combine to create a beautiful game. It's a pity, then, that this sequel is let down by crushing difficulty that will often have you gnashing your teeth with frustration. We'll stick with the original.

» Score **70%**

The Legend Of Zelda: Spirit Tracks

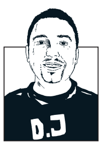
LINK'S LATEST GAME STRAYS OFF THE TRACKS

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** DS » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
» **PRICE:** £39.99 » **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE » **PLAYERS:** 1-2

NDS



» [DS] There are plenty of engaging boss battles, even if many of them do feel slightly familiar.



We hate to say it, but Link's adventures are starting to feel a little old. *Spirit Tracks* is a great game that any publisher would be proud to have under its belt, but this is Nintendo by the numbers. The plot, which sees a ghostly Princess Zelda trying to regain her corporeal form, is pleasing enough and some of the later puzzles are evil, but there's an underlying feeling that we've played it all before.

A few new items appear, many of which make use of the DS's microphone, but before long you'll be using the same old weapons to solve the same old puzzles. Travelling, as before, is handled by drawing out your route beforehand, but unlike *Phantom Hourglass* you're given very little freedom, having to stick to the pre-made tracks. Granted, you can upgrade your train and catch rabbits to



pass the time, but there's no denying that this travelling mechanic is starting to feel pretty tired now.

Visually it's as refreshing as ever, although there aren't as many facial expressions this time around, and there's no faulting the wonderfully polished tunes, but *Spirit Tracks* just feels tired. Zelda's spirit form and her ability to take over certain creatures is a nice touch, and it's a perfectly good game; we were just expecting something fitting Link's heritage.

OPINION



I really enjoyed *Phantom Hourglass* so don't really mind that this is nearly a straight retread. The addition of Zelda adds a nice element to the puzzles and the story is really charming; I've also been impressed with some of the huge bosses. Another great handheld adventure.

Stuart Hunt

» Scores

Presentation	90%
Graphics	92%
Sound	85%
Playability	88%
Addictivity	79%

Overall 85%

iPhone



» [iPhone] While the controls are perfectly acceptable, later levels are quite tough to get through.

Earthworm Jim

GROOVY! EARTHWORM JIM GOES CELLULAR

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** IPHONE/IPOD TOUCH » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
» **PRICE:** £2.99 » **PUBLISHER:** GAMELOFT » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE » **PLAYERS:** 1



Earth's most famous annelid is now 16 years old and he's appeared on everything from the Mega Drive to the GBA. He's now swung onto Apple's iPhone, and while there are a few slight control issues, the classic gameplay of old still shines through.

Even today, *Earthworm Jim* remains an extremely funny game, and it's also highly polished, with Shiny's impossibly slick animation still holding up. Helped by the iPhone's wonderfully sharp screen, *Earthworm Jim* looks sensational with its new visuals and proves that there's no need to make everything in 3D just because you can.

Control-wise, *Earthworm Jim* is surprisingly good, although cracks do appear on the later stages that require pinpoint accuracy. Gameloft has chosen both virtual D-pad and analogue controls, and each work with a decent degree of success, although hitting diagonals using both is often



a real pain. *Jim*'s bonus stages are now accelerometer-controlled, and surprisingly, these work rather nicely as well. There are plenty of occasions when your thumb can move off the stick or that you miss one of the virtual button presses, but this is still a very faithful translation.

With its varied gameplay, large number of levels and solid price tag, *Earthworm Jim* is a definite download for fans of the original. It's not as good as the Mega Drive version, but it's hard to see anyone making a better iPhone port than this.

OPINION



I've been playing this quite a bit recently after interviewing original developer Stephen Crow, so it's great to see that the game still holds up really well. The controls certainly aren't perfect on the iPhone, but Gameloft has done the best it can. A very solid port indeed.

Stuart Hunt

» Scores

Presentation	68%
Graphics	90%
Sound	85%
Playability	72%
Addictivity	80%

Overall 78%

Rush Rush Rally Racing

MICRO MAYHEM ON YOUR SEGA DREAMCAST

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** DREAMCAST » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
» **PRICE:** £13 » **PUBLISHER:** REDSPOTGAMES » **DEVELOPER:** SENILE TEAM » **PLAYERS:** 1-4



Now here's a surprise: a brand new Dreamcast title that isn't actually a shoot-'em-up.

RedSpotGames continues its support of one of the world's greatest ever consoles with its latest release: a top-down racer that has more than a little in common with the excellent *Micro Machines*. Those expecting the usual Dreamcast visuals will be disappointed, as the low-res pixel work that is on offer here is obviously designed to mimic earlier machines like the Mega Drive and Neo Geo. The end result is that while *Rush Rush Rally Racing* looks rather basic, everything runs along at a cracking pace and is further complemented by some brilliant, punchy audio.

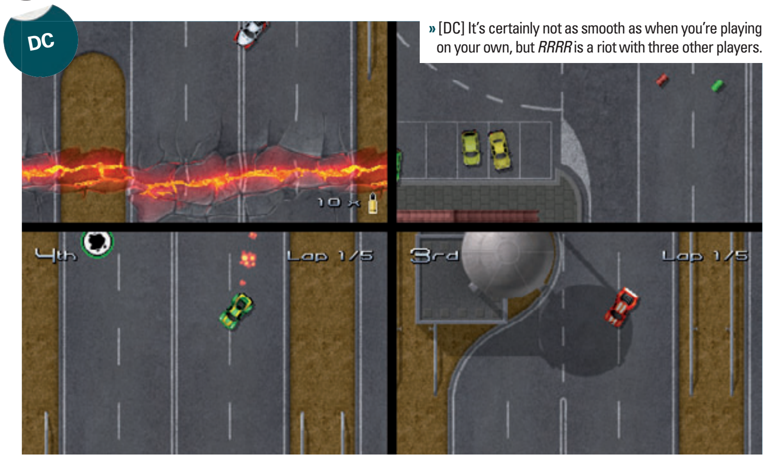
The main campaign mode features ten progressively hard tracks to master, with a further nine to unlock, although these are for multiplayer only. Controls are tight and responsive, the five available cars all have their own stats, and developer Senile Team has also included some unlockables – we've found the *A-Team* van so far – as well.

The real joy of *RRRR*, though, comes from its fun multiplayer modes. While the frame rate obviously takes a hit when playing with two or more players – fortunately the excellent Get Ahead mode doesn't suffer, as it's just two cars on a single screen – it remains a fast and frantic experience, made all the better due to the varied power-ups and cleverly designed tracks.

It does suffer from a high difficulty curve and certain tracks can be a little confusing on first play, but this remains a superb little racer. Great price as well.

» Scores

Presentation	70%
Graphics	72%
Sound	85%
Playability	86%
Addictivity	80%
Overall	**84%**



» [DC] It's certainly not as smooth as when you're playing on your own, but *RRRR* is a riot with three other players.



OPINION



The level design is a bit sloppy in places, causing some confusion over where you're supposed to drive. But, apart from that, *RRRR* is a rather excellent racing game. The *Micro Machines*-style catch-up mode is a particular favourite in the office.

Ashley Day

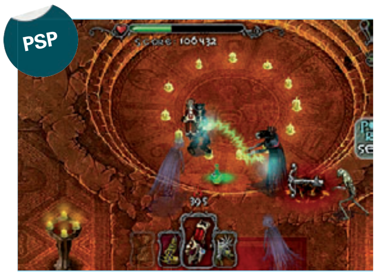


The Settlers

» **SYSTEM:** iPHONE/iPOD TOUCH
» **PRICE:** £3.99 » **PLAYERS:** 1

» Gameloft's port of the classic computer hit is surprisingly good. While the visuals and menus are a little on the small size, they're always easy to work out, while the game itself features intuitive and solid touch controls. In fact, the only thing that really lets down Gameloft's impressive conversion is the lack of additional gameplay modes and a multiplayer option. Still, it's a great start.

» Score **83%**

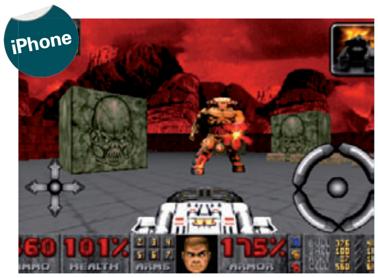


Dracula: Undead Awakening

» **SYSTEM:** PSP MINIS
» **PRICE:** £3.99 » **PLAYERS:** 1

» Chillingo's classy iPhone shooter is now available on Sony's PSP, with slightly prettier visuals and easier controls. It's lost something, however, and while it's a lot easier to play, it's not long before you begin wishing for more variety. It's still a fun blaster; we simply hoped for a lot more from this than a quick port.

» Score **72%**



Doom Classic

» **SYSTEM:** iPHONE/iPOD TOUCH
» **PRICE:** £3.99 » **PLAYERS:** 1-4

» After impressing us with the iPhone port of *Wolfenstein 3D*, it's now *Doom*'s turn to get a high-tech makeover. *Doom* works surprisingly well as a portable shooter and it's perfect for a quick blast whenever you have a spare five minutes. Unfortunately, it still suffers in the control department, and while this is slicker than *Wolfenstein*, it's still far from perfect.

» Score **70%**



Jambo Safari

» **SYSTEM:** WII
» **PRICE:** £34.99 » **PLAYERS:** 1-4

» We're torn over *Jambo Safari*. On the one hand it retains the giddy excitement of the original arcade game and has been translated extremely well to Nintendo's console; on the other it's full of superfluous mini-games designed to appeal to the kiddie crowd. Sega has tried to find a fine line between the two, but it hasn't quite succeeded. Fans will still get something from it, though.

» Score **60%**

» ALIEN BREED EVOLUTION PART 1



» [XBLA] The co-op modes take part in different locations to the single-player game and are brilliantly designed.

★ GO DEEPER

The facts behind Alien Breed Evolution

» The last game in the franchise before *Evolution* was *Alien Breed 3D II: The Killing Grounds*, which was released in 1996

» Team 17 released an enhanced update in 1992, which was so popular that it stayed in the charts for over a year

★ WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD

ALIEN SYNDROME (ARCADE)



▽ SOMETHING NEW

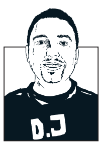
KILLZONE: LIBERATION (PSP)



IT'S ALIEN BREED, BUT NOT QUITE AS YOU REMEMBER IT

Alien Breed Evolution Part 1





Let's face it: this new *Alien Breed* never would have seen the light of day if digital distribution didn't exist. Now that such a harsh but truthful fact is out of the way, let's see if Team17 has been able to recapture the lightning that it first successfully bottled 19 years ago.

Those expecting a fast and frantic coin-op blast akin to the Amiga games are going to be disappointed. Yes, there are frenzied firefights throughout this reboot, but they are far more deliberately placed, meaning you're rarely swarmed like in the past. Think *Doom 3* or *Dead Space* with a slight isometric slant and you'll have more of an idea where Team17 is heading with the first of its three episodic parts.

Aesthetically, *Evolution* is immense, with beautifully stylised visuals, exceptional lighting effects and an immense, thumping soundtrack that constantly comes to the fore whenever you battle *Evolution*'s rather bland-looking xenomorphs. Gameplay, on the other hand, is less impressive, with you slowly being steered from one generic task to the next. Considering that objectives were handled with so much variety in *Tower Assault*, it's a pity that *Evolution*'s aren't up to the same standard.

Spread across three admittedly large levels, *Evolution* is far more tense than the original game and features alien attacks that are best described as sporadic. Every now and then you'll encounter a *Dead Space*-style lockdown that has you assaulted by hordes of the buggers, but you'll often find yourself wandering around the highly detailed levels, wishing that there was a little more to shoot at.

If *Alien Breed* manages to ever so slightly disappoint as a single-player experience, then it makes up for it when a second player joins the fray. Tightly designed to best make use of that second player, alien attacks are far more frantic and it begins to feel more like the game you fell in love with in the first place. It's still not perfect – it's often hard to make out which player you are as they look almost identical – but being able to cover your mate as he's desperately hacking into a save point or grabbing that last health pack makes for a far more satisfying experience. Here's hoping our few niggles are corrected for part two.

INFORMATION

- **FEATURED SYSTEM:** XBOX LIVE ARCADE
- **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A
- **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- **PRICE:** 800 POINTS
- **PUBLISHER:** TEAM17
- **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- **PLAYERS:** 1-2

BRIEF HISTORY

» The first *Alien Breed* was released in 1991. Effectively an Amiga version of *Gauntlet* with guns and numerous xenomorphs, it became a huge success for Team17, spawning six sequels. *Tower Assault* is easily the best game in the original series and a must play if you've not already experienced it.

OPINION



There were bits I really enjoyed about *Alien Breed* and others I didn't. I liked the perspective, controls and art style, and the co-op mode is a great laugh. But I would have liked to have seen more variety. It feels claustrophobic but lacks the labyrinthine feel of the old games.

Stuart Hunt

In a nutshell

A solid reboot that takes the *Alien Breed* series in a new direction. It's not without its issues and isn't as fast-paced as the original game, but there's still plenty to enjoy.

» Scores

Presentation	70%
Graphics	90%
Sound	80%
Playability	78%
Addictivity	72%

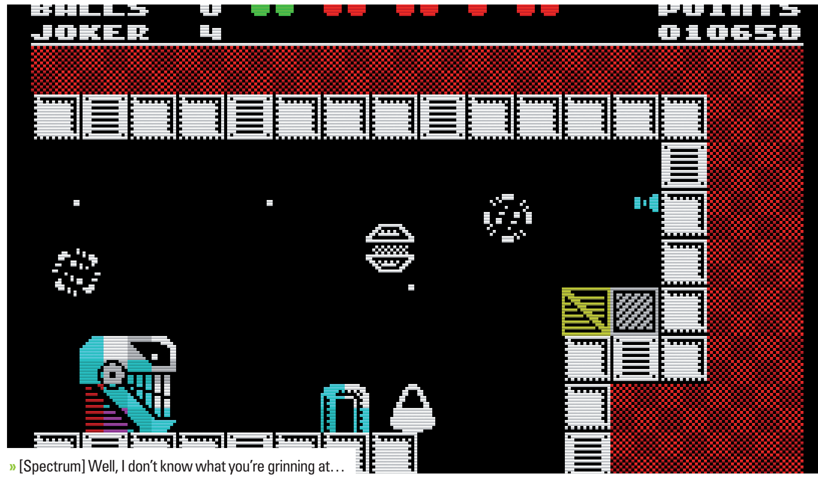
Overall 74%



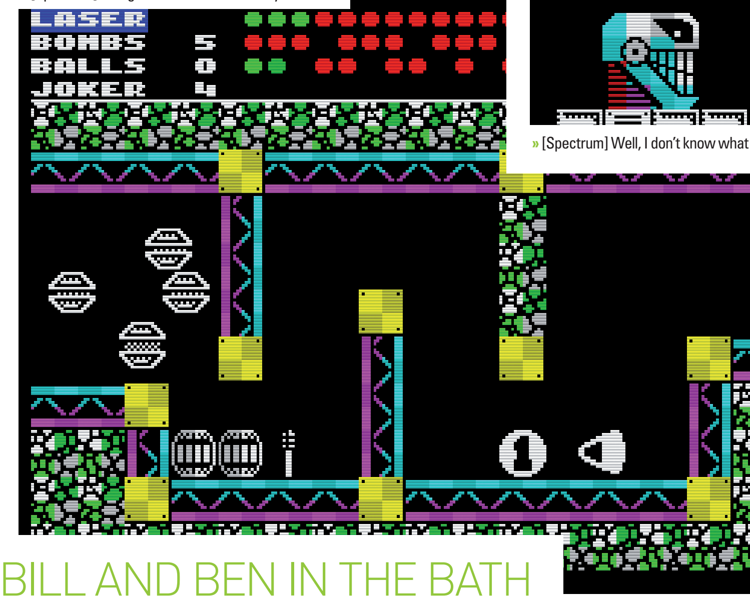
Retro Gamer has been rather involved in some of this month's homebrew. Manic Miner was inspired by an article in the magazine, and the developer of Get The Cake is a regular on our forums. It's wonderful to see developers emerging from the forum, and who knows? The next C64 or Spectrum hit could be developed by one of our readers!



» [Spectrum] A large 1! Just what I've always wanted!



» [Spectrum] Well, I don't know what you're grinning at…



» [Spectrum] The final frontier…



SOUNDS LIKE BILL AND BEN IN THE BATH

SLUBBERDEGULLION



FORMAT: SPECTRUM
DEVELOPED BY: JONATHAN CAULDWELL
LINK: WWW.CRONOSOFT.CO.UK
RELEASE DATE: 2009
PRICE: £3.99 [CASSETTE]
REVIEWED BY: JASON KELK

Billed by developer Jonathan Cauldwell as something of a follow-on to his *Cybernoid*-inspired 2003 release *Rough Justice*, *Slubberdegullion* takes those ideas and adds a different control system. The game world is still a series of flick-screen rooms that can only be travelled through by the one route, but rather than the simple four-directional controls and bidirectional firing, the player's ship now rotates and thrusts to move around, bringing it more in line with Cauldwell's *Blizzard's Rift*.

Those changes might initially appear to be minor, but it makes a huge difference to how the main weapon is used. The ability to fire shots at just about any angle rather than purely to the left or right makes it possible to take out some of the defences where they would otherwise be inaccessible or blow away nasties approaching from above or below, but at the same time the need to rotate the ship to line up a shot can leave it exposed to attacks from other angles. The limited stock of secondary weapons can be triggered by pressing down to select them and simply stabbing at the fire button.

As fans of *Rough Justice*, we were looking forward to sitting down with *Slubberdegullion*, and initially those controls threw us totally for a loop and it just didn't seem right – thankfully there's no inertia to complicate things further – but after a little acclimatisation and a couple of expletives for good measure, it all starts to click and the controls begin to work.

As with its predecessor, the difficulty level is quite high but generally speaking not as truly evil as *Cybernoids*. Roaming droids materialise from vortexes before getting in the way of the player, ground-based rockets launch when they detect an intruder nearby, robotic skulls discharge spinning bullets, and occasionally the odd ceiling block will unexpectedly work loose and plummet down the play area. When some of these defences are destroyed, they drop numbered tokens and diamonds that can be collected, the former being used for topping up supplies of the secondary weapons and the latter being… well, all pretty and shiny.

Apart from the rather weak loading picture, which simply isn't a patch on the one included with *Rough Justice*, the graphics look pretty decent throughout, with a good selection of detailed, well-animated sprites inhabiting the levels, each of which sport a distinctive look and feature quite a bit of colour to boot. The sound is equally accomplished, using the Spectrum's beeper for sound effects, and, if the machine is equipped with an AY sound chip, an up-tempo piece of music plays throughout as well.

We had no idea what the title *Slubberdegullion* actually meant, but a quick delve around with Google came back with definitions including a "slobbering or dirty fellow" and indeed a "worthless sloven". What that has to do with blasting defence drones or collecting diamonds isn't entirely obvious, so perhaps he's just talking about us. If so, we need words, Jonathan!

91%

NEW GAMES NEEDED

If you have a homebrew project you would like to see featured then please contact us at:
retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk

ATTACKWAVE

REVIEWED BY: JASON KELK

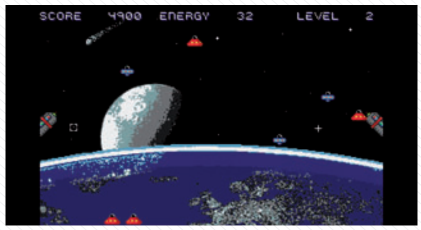
» **FORMAT:** ATARI ST » **DEVELOPER:** PARADIZE
» **DOWNLOAD:** PARADIZE.FINAL-MEMORY.ORG » **PRICE:** FREE

A laser base in geostationary orbit stands in the way of an all-out alien invasion and the player has been tasked with manning the cannons, moving the targeting cursor and giving the little beggars what for. Every shot fired drains energy from the batteries, so precise shooting is an absolute must, conserving power to continue protecting the planet.

But frustration sets in when, after trying all four control options, it becomes apparent that none of them really offer the level of accuracy required to survive in the long term, so by the third level, where a fast-moving yellow nasty is introduced, the onslaught becomes close to impossible to deal with. Sound is a mixture of sampled effects and reasonable chip tunes, graphics are okay – but not a patch on *r0x*, another recent ST action game – and the presentation is nice, but those controls just make it too frustrating to really enjoy.

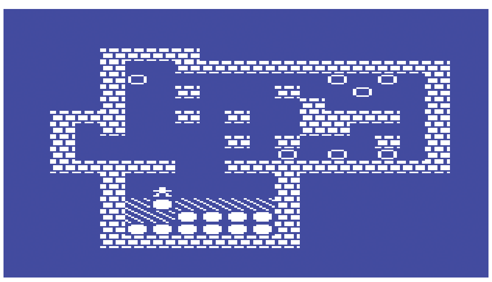
44%





» [Atari ST] We love a party with a happy atmosphere.





» [VIC] A pallet truck would have been helpful.

SOKOBAN

REVIEWED BY: JASON KELK

» **FORMAT:** UNEXPANDED VIC-20 » **DEVELOPER:** MICHAEL KIRCHER
» **DOWNLOAD:** TINYURL.COM/YAUO4AD » **PRICE:** FREE

Anyone who has ever worked in a warehouse knows that *Sokoban* really isn't an accurate portrayal of a warehouseman's work. Usually it's less about actually organising the stock and more a case of trying to get orders out on time. That's probably why we can enjoy *Sokoban* despite old warehouse jobs still giving us nightmares…

And although this only requires an unexpanded VIC, a giddying 90 warehouses have been included through the magic of multi loading, and these challenging stages can either be played through in order or a specific stage selected from the title page.

It's reasonably executed and offers lots to see, so the only issue is cosmetic. Along with perhaps needing more colour during play, there isn't an on-screen indication of which level the player is currently on, so returning to a stage requires the keeping of notes while playing, otherwise it's easy to get lost along the way.

84%

JUNO FIRST

REVIEWED BY: JASON KELK

» **FORMAT:** ATARI 2600 » **DEVELOPER:** CHRIS WALTON
» **DOWNLOAD:** TINYURL.COM/YDG9KWY » **PRICE:** FREE

Attempting to squeeze a game like Konami's 1983 coin-op *Juno First* into the Atari 2600 was an incredibly brave decision. The original is a simple but effective shoot-'em-up; almost a *Galaga*-style blaster but one where the playfield has been tilted to generate a three-dimensional effect similar to the flat levels of *Tempest*, and the player can control the speed of their ship as it flies into the screen. And despite the limitations of the hardware necessitating some paring down to make it workable, developer Chris Walton has managed to produce a decent conversion.

The action is remarkably fast and fluid, even with a large number of objects in play, the 3D effect as everything zooms out of the distance still works, all of the in-game graphics are colourful and clear, and the cherry on the cake is some authentic early Eighties shoot-'em-up sound effects. Brightly coloured, violent and enjoyable – what more could anyone want?

87%

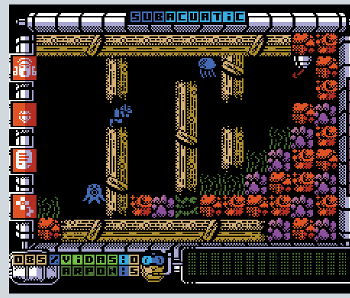




» [Atari 2600] Red sky at night, the refinery's alight!

WHAT'S BREWING?

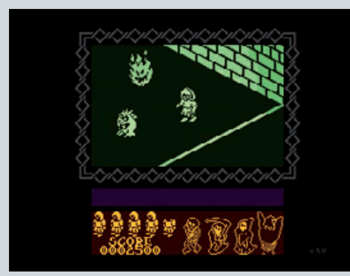
All the latest news from the homebrew community



» [Spectrum] New Spectrum colours!

» Snap

To start with, there's an underwater-themed action game called *Subacuatic* and, since the designers liked it so much, a sequel called *Subacuatic Reloaded* as well, both from those pesky Mojon Twins. Both titles require a 128K Spectrum and, if loaded into either the Harlequin (a hardware-based Spectrum clone) or one of the emulators supporting its enhanced ULA, *Subacuatic* will automatically utilise the extra colours available. The Twins' website is **www.mojontwins.com**.



» [Atari 8-bit] Save the town from demons!

» Crackle

Conversion demon xxl has been busy recently. Following on from his highly successful 2007 port of the Stamper Spectrum classic *Knight Lore* over to the Atari 8-bit, he's continued the theme with a conversion of another Ultimate isometric title: *Nightshade*. It's a little less colourful in this form – although a nice background lighting effect has been added – but would-be demon hunters can find the download and a selection of screenshots over at AtariMania: **tinyurl.com/ykppyn3**

» Pop!

And continuing the Ultimate conversion theme, it isn't quite a homebrew – although developer Matt Young did write it at home, so that sort of counts – but the previously missing C64 conversion of *The Bubbler* has been found, tidied up and released for everybody to play! It isn't quite as fast as the Spectrum original, but is perfectly playable. More information and the all-important download can be found at **tinyurl.com/ygyofzn**.

HOMEBREW

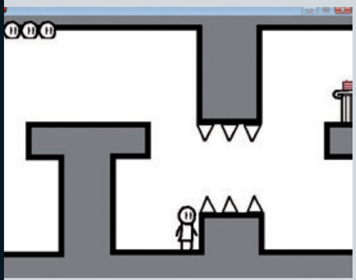
» The scene's latest news and reviews

WHAT'S BREWING?

All the latest news from the homebrew community

» For The Good Of All Of Us

After the fun of playing *ASCIIpOrtal* last issue, there's yet more 2D Valve-inspired goodness to enjoy in the form of *Get The Cake*. Some of the general rules are different from the original game in a deliberate attempt to make things less action-oriented, and for example the portals only work in a single direction here. What's interesting is that *Get The Cake* was developed by jimbo too, who is one of the regular posters at the **Retro Gamer** message boards. It can be downloaded at **tinyurl.com/yfzkt3c**.

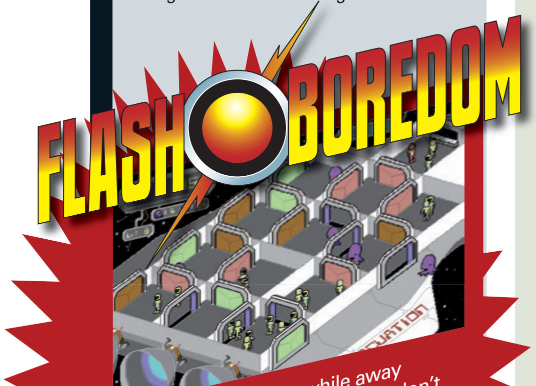


» [PC] Apparently, the cake isn't a lie.

» It's All Gone Dark!

Although it isn't a game as such, programming language DarkBasic Pro (available from **darkbasicpro.thegamecreators.com**) has recently been made available free in an ad-supported form, which can be used to create standalone games, but the editor will advertise at programmers as they're working. DarkBasic has been used to produce some great homebrew in the past, so anybody thinking about making their own games should at least give it a look.

FLASH BOREDOM

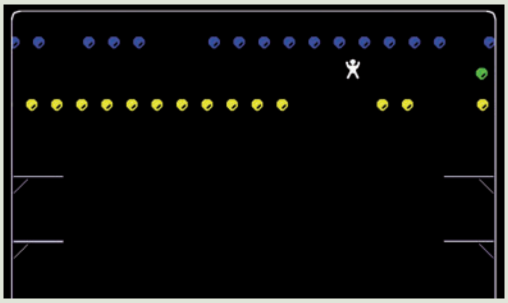


Want to know how to while away those boring office hours? Then don't miss out on **Retro Gamer**'s Flash game of the month. This month we look at ***Evacuation***.

YOUR SPACESHIP HAS been invaded, so you must open the colour-coded airlocks to cast the creatures into the void while keeping all of the officers and as many of the crew alive as possible. Sort of like that scene in *Aliens*, but slightly more cerebral and without the Power Lifter.

www.foddy.net/Evacuation.html

REMAKES WE'VE BEEN PLAYING…



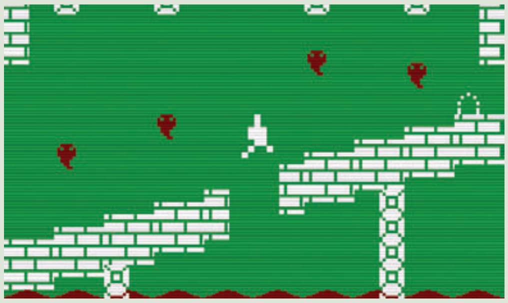
SEESAW CIRCUS

» **DOWNLOAD:** SPACEFRACTAL.COM



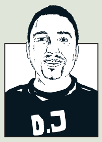
Roll up, roll up! Watch the acrobats as they tumble through the air, take control of their seesaw and guide them towards balloons to score. Win a coconut! Maybe not, but prizes aside, this remake of the Exidy coin-op *Circus* has all the fun of the big top without the risk of standing in elephant dung.

The game itself is incredibly simple: flip one of the two little men into the air, pop balloons, catch him on the way down, then rinse and repeat – when a row is cleared it regenerates and a bonus is awarded. It's never going to win awards for depth, but playing it is strangely hypnotic and would almost be relaxing apart from the moments when the tumblers are moving quickly.



DUNGEON

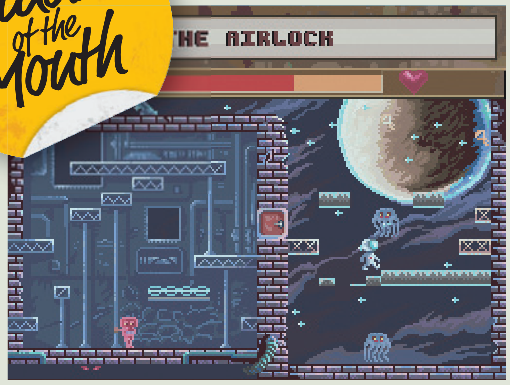
» **DOWNLOAD:** WWW.SUPERFUNDUNGEONRUN.COM/?P=604



***Dungeon* is a** little like an unarmed version of *Star Guard* (reviewed in issue 71), except that it isn't anywhere near as much fun to play. The King is dead, a bloody sword lies nearby and the player is embroiled in a chase to discover and capture his murderer, haring through a series of very difficult screens littered with platforms, spikes and nasties.

What makes it particularly annoying is that for 'artistic' reasons the game has some elements that are randomly decided when the program is first run, and those decisions, including player and enemy speeds or if the water is fatal, can make an already difficult game impossible to play. *Dungeon* is interesting as a social experiment, perhaps, but noticeably less successful as an enjoyable game.

Remake of the Month





MANIC MINER IN THE LOST LEVELS

» **DOWNLOAD:** HEADSOFT.COM.AU/INDEX.PHP?CATEGORY=MMLL

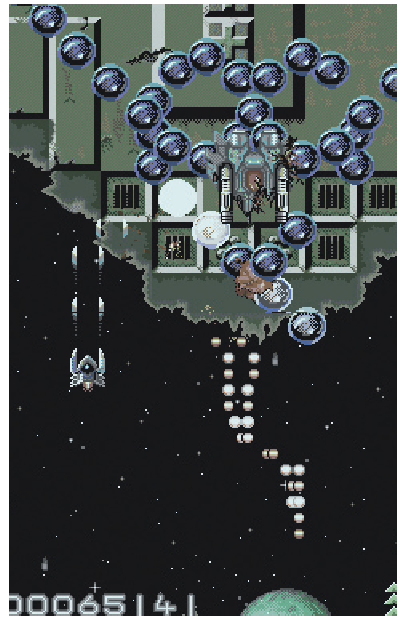


***Willy*-loving readers** will probably remember Stuart Campbell's article back in issue 63 where he compiled a list of lost *Manic Miner* levels; these were the stages created by various developers as they converted the Spectrum original to other platforms. That gave the team behind the excellent *Warhawk DS* an idea: what if they created a new game that put all of those levels into one place? *Manic Miner In The Lost Levels* is that game, collecting the cream of the screens together, giving them a serious makeover and then adding more levels, just for good measure.

The only issue that novice *Manic Miner* players need be aware of is the difficulty. The first stage alone is tricky since it was originally stage 17 of the Oric conversion, and things don't get much easier from there. It seems that the developers realised just how challenging these screens are because they've thoughtfully included the option to restart at the last screen reached and several variations on the game over sequence – being flattened by Morrissey's head, the game's box or a toilet, for example – presumably because they're expecting people to see it quite a bit. For long-term fans this should be a no-brainer and, while beginners may struggle, persevering should prove very rewarding.







» **Above:** [DS] Who you gonna call?
» **Right:** [DS] *Warhawk* gets supercharged for the DS!

HOMEBREW HEROES

MICHAEL 'FLASH' WARE HAS CREATED SOME GAMES THAT WE LIKE HERE, SUCH AS WARHAWK FOR THE C64 AND THE DS REMAKE. AND SINCE WE'VE JUST GIVEN MANIC MINER IN THE LOST LEVELS THE REMAKE OF THE MONTH, IT SEEMED A GOOD TIME TO GET TO KNOW HIM A LITTLE BETTER...

Retro Gamer: What was it that initially got you into programming games?
Michael Ware: It was perhaps more about timing. In the Eighties, a high number of releases were coded by a single person or small team. I spent a lot of time playing with code on the ZX80 and then the Spectrum – this was the machine that got me excited about writing games, and I wrote several with a friend Ian Gogay. When the Commodore 64 was released, the prospects of writing games on that were too much to resist. Deciding that a shooting game would be a perfect game to program for the system, and having a love of *Star Force* in the arcades, we decided to write *Warhawk*. Joined by Andrew Betts, the three of us completed the game in seven months.

RG: You started out as a backroom coder and have returned to those roots. What led to that?
MW: I gave up coding after *Horace In The Mystic Woods* was released by Psion. That was about 14 years ago.

I never lost the passion for the old-school games and enjoyed playing them through emulation. I was using a front end called GameEx and became a member of the forum. It was here that I got chatting to a chap called Ben Baker (aka Headkaze), and he said, 'Why don't we write a game?' The DS processor is fairly similar to the C64's 6510, so this seemed a good machine to play with. We both decided that a remake of *Warhawk* would be a great project to start with, and decided it would be fun to code in assembly, as this had not really been done in a game on the DS. We were lucky to find a graphic artist (Lobo) and a musician (Spacefractal), and also had permission to use the remix of *Warhawk* by Press Play on Tape. Suddenly, the coding bug bit me again!

RG: How do these two eras compare?
MW: The only real difference between then and now is that the development is easier. Back in the Eighties, you were always crashing your machine when testing, compiling took ages, and backing code up took even longer. Today, we have great coding environments and testing can be done in emulation, if needed.

RG: Where do you think the homebrew community's popularity comes from?
MW: I can relate to the homebrew community's passion from a retro perspective, as the challenge of taking a classic game and remaking in on another platform is very endearing. Also, the quality of current homebrew releases are astoundingly high. This really shows the passion that goes into their construction, and this can only be a great thing for the players: high quality, mostly free games.

RG: What can everybody look forward to seeing from you next?
MW: At the moment, I am still playing on the DS platform and working on an original title with Ben. I have realised that I should not continue to code in assembly and *Manic Miner In The Lost Levels* will possibly be the last game coded that way. At the moment I am putting my time into the joys of C.

RG: Since we're fans of the original *Warhawk*, is there any chance of a follow-up for the C64 at all?
MW: I would love to have the time to put the things I have learnt since 1986 into another C64 title, but I do not have the time to spend on it. There is always a chance of another *Warhawk* title, though.

RG: Finally, what advice can you give to anybody wanting to become involved in homebrew development?
MW: Places like Retro Remakes, GameDev.net, and GBAdev.org are great places to go for help and advice. There is a thriving community that anyone can get involved in. There are also several options when it comes to the actual coding of homebrew that extends beyond C. It could not be an easier time to start learning code.

HIGH FIVE
The homebrew games Michael can't live without

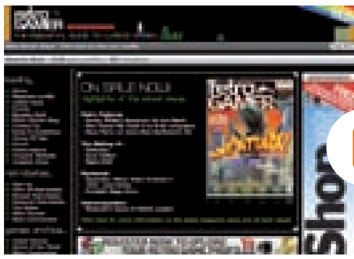
1. **Thrust (Vectrex) by Ville Krumlinde** This is just such a fantastic piece of work on wonderful hardware.
2. **Omega Race (PC) by Sokurah** The VIC-20 version was perhaps my favourite game on that system and this remake retains all the fun.
3. **Nitrotracker (DS) by Tobias Weyand** It is not a game, but it is a heck of a lot of fun.
4. **Joe Gunn (C64) by Georg Rottensteiner** This just oozes class and shows the programmer was really enjoying creating it.
5. **Astro Nell (VIC-20) by Matt Simmonds** An incredible achievement fitting all this game in such a small space: just 3.5k. Wow!

BARGAIN HUNT

DESPERATE TO FINISH OFF YOUR RETRO COLLECTION? WANT TO GET YOUR HANDS ON ALL THE BEST BARGAINS BUT DON'T KNOW WHERE TO GO? THEN VISIT **WWW.RETROGAMER.NET/BARGAIN_HUNT.PHP** AND DISCOVER ALL THE CLASSIC MACHINES THAT YOU'LL EVER NEED

You've been asking for it forever, but we're pleased to announce a brand new look for **Retro Gamer**'s Buyer's Guide section that makes it incredibly easy to get your hands on all the best retro bargains.

Using our new search engine couldn't be easier. All you need to do is select a manufacturer and machine from the pull-down menu. Once you've found the system you're after, the magic of the internet will search eBay for the top 20 ending items, meaning that you'll be able to gauge the market's health with very little effort. This month, Stuart's been looking at console collections.



Head on over to the excellent **www.retrogamer.net** and click on 'Bargain Hunt' or visit **www.retrogamer.net/bargain_hunt.php**



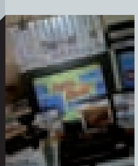
Put in the details for the greatest computer in the world and discuss with your staff writer why it's so much better than the ZX Spectrum.



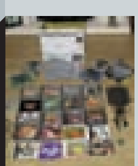
Swoon in delight as you find yourself getting ever closer to collecting all the £1.99 *Simulator* games that Codemasters ever released.

eBAY BARGAINS

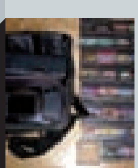
Retro Gamer has been scouring the world's most popular auction site to find the best bargains out there…



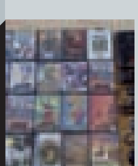
■ Darran was kicking himself on missing this Master System bundle. The 18 games included *Lemmings*, *Klax*, *R-Type* and *Mercs* and it went for a bargain £30.



■ Somebody got a bargain here. It includes a selection of pads and ten games, including *Tekken 3*, *Gran Turismo* and *Metal Gear Solid*. The price? Just £23.50.



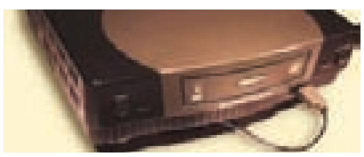
■ Now here's a sweet deal. The final price of £117 seems steep, but you're getting an Atari Lynx II and 39 games including *Rampage* and *STUN Runner*.



■ We always thought you could pick up Mega Drives for next to nothing, but this auction proved us wrong. With 20 games it went for a rather high £50.

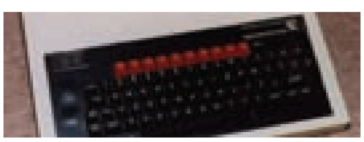
3DO

3DO GOLDSTAR	£45+ ($81+)
PANASONIC FZ-1 (FRONT LOADER)	£40+ ($74+)
PANASONIC FZ-10 (TOP LOADER)	£20+ ($37+)



ACORN

ARCHIMEDES	£30 ($55)
ATOM	£50 ($92)
ELECTRON	£10 ($18)
BBC MICRO	£15 ($28)



AMSTRAD

CPC 464	£10+ ($18+)
CPC 664	£90+ ($165+)
CPC 6128	£25+ ($46+)
GX4000	£50+ ($92+)

APPLE

APPLE II	£30+ ($55+)

ATARI

400/800/600XL/XE	£20+ ($37+)
2600 (VCS)	£20+ ($37+)
5200	£30 ($55)
7800	£20+ ($37+)
JAGUAR	£20+ ($37+)
JAGUAR CD	£70 ($129)
LYNX I/II	£20+ ($37+)
ST	£20+ ($37+)

BANDAI

GUNDAM RX-78	£75+ ($138+)
PLAYDIA	£90 ($166)
PIPPIN (ATMARK)	£500+ ($921+)
WONDERSWAN	£10 ($18)
WONDERSWAN COLOR	£20 ($37)
WONDERSWAN CRYSTAL	£25 ($46)



COMMODORE

AMIGA 500/600/1200	£20+ ($37+)
C16/PLUS/4	£15+ ($28+)
C64	£10+ ($18+)
C64 GS	£30+ ($55+)
C128	£30+ ($55+)
CDTV	£20 ($37)
CD32	£25 ($46)
VIC-20	£10+ ($18+)



FUJITSU

FUJITSU FM	£100+ ($184+)
FUJITSU FM TOWNS MARTY	£200+ ($368+)



MISCELLANEOUS

BALLY ASTROCADE	£20 ($37)
BARCODE BATTLER	£5 ($18)
CASIO LOOPY	£25 ($46)
FAIRCHILD CHANNEL F	£10 ($18)
COLECOVISION	£30 ($55)
DRAGON 32/64	£8 ($15)
ARCADIA 2001	£10 ($18)
EPOCH CASSETTE VISION	£20 ($37)
EPOCH SUPER CASSETTE VISION	£30 ($55)
INTELLIVISION	£40+ ($74+)
ODYSSEY	£10 ($18)
ORIC-1	£20 ($37)
PLAYSTATION	£10 ($18)
SAM COUPÉ	£50-£200 ($92-$368)
SUPERVISION	£15 ($28)
TIGER ELEC GAME.COM	£15 ($28)
TOMY TUTOR (MK1/JR/MK2)	£10 ($18)
VECTREX (MB/GCE)	£80 ($147)
X68000	£90+ ($166+)

MSX

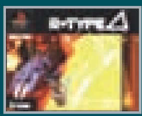
MSX 1	£10+ ($18+)
MSX 2	£20+ ($37+)
MSX 2+	£30+ ($55+)
MSX TURBO R	£30+ ($55+)

NEC

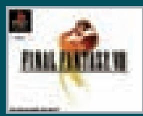
PC-6###	£10+ ($18+)

RETRO AUCTION WATCH

Retro Gamer sifts through the pages of eBay to report back on any items of interest, hardware or software that caught our eyes. This month Darran's digging through some PlayStation games.



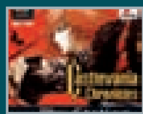
R-TYPE DELTA
System: **PlayStation**
Normally sells for **£10**
Ended at **£2.67**



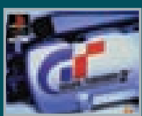
FINAL FANTASY VIII
System: **PlayStation**
Normally sells for **£20**
Ended at **£4.65**



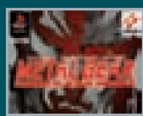
SILENT HILL
System: **PlayStation**
Normally sells for **£5**
Ended at **£14.98**



CASTLEVANIA CHRONICLES
System: **PlayStation**
Normally sells for **£15**
Ended at **£23.45**



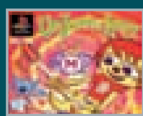
GRAN TURISMO 2
System: **PlayStation**
Normally sells for **£10**
Ended at **No Sale**



METAL GEAR SOLID
System: **PlayStation**
Normally sells for **£10**
Ended at **£6.34**



DIABLO
System: **PlayStation**
Normally sells for **£15**
Ended at **£29.01**



UMJAMMER LAMMY
System: **PlayStation**
Normally sells for **£15**
Ended at **£24.89**

PC-8801	**£20 ($37)**
PC-9801	**£35 ($65)**
PC-FX	**£50 ($92)**
PC-ENGINE	**£55 ($101)**
PC-ENGINE GT	**£70+ ($129+)**
TURBOGRAFX-16	**£30 ($55)**
TURBO EXPRESS	**£50 ($92)**
SUPERGRAFX	**£80 ($147)**
PC-E CD-ROM/ TURBOGRAFX CD	**£50+ ($92+)**
PC-E DUO/ TURBO DUO	**£120 ($221)**
DUO-R	**£80 ($147)**

NINTENDO

FAMICOM	**£60 ($111)**
FAMICOM AV	**£40 ($74)**
FAMICOM DISK SYSTEM	**£70 ($129)**
SHARP FAMICOM TWIN	**£100 ($184)**
GAME & WATCH	**£1+ ($2+)**
GAME BOY B/W	**£5 ($9)**
GAME BOY POCKET	**£8 ($15)**
GAME BOY COLOR	**£12 ($22)**
GAME BOY ADVANCE	**£25 ($46)**
N64	**£10 ($18)**
N64 DD	**£150+ ($276+)**
NES (TOASTER)	**£15 ($28)**
NES (DOG BONE)	**£50 ($92)**
SNES (SUPER FAMICOM IN JAPAN)	**£20 ($37)**
SNES 2 (KNOWN AS 'JR' IN JAPAN)	**£50+ ($92+)**
VIRTUAL BOY	**£80 ($147)**



PHILIPS

CD-I	**£20+ ($37+)**
CD-I 450/500	**£30 ($55)**
VIDEOPAC G7000	**£10 ($18)**
VIDEOPAC G7400	**£20 ($37)**

SEGA

32X	**£35 ($65)**
DREAMCAST	**£25 ($46)**
GAME GEAR	**£15 ($28)**
SG-1000	**£50-£150 ($80-$260)**
SC-3000	**£50 ($92)**
MASTER SYSTEM I/II	**£10 ($18)**



AMSTRAD MEGA PC	**£10 ($18)**
TERADRIVE	**£100 ($184)**
MEGA DRIVE/ GENESIS I/II	**£25 ($46)**
GENESIS 3	**£35 ($65)**
NOMAD	**£100 ($184)**
MULTIMEGA/ WONDERMEGA/ CDX/X'EYE	**£100+ ($184+)**
MEGA-CD (SCD) I/II	**£50+ ($92+)**
PICO	**£20 ($37)**
SATURN	**£30 ($55)**
MEGA CD (SCD) I/II	**£50+ ($92+)**

SINCLAIR

ZX80	**£200 ($368)**
ZX81	**£70 ($129)**
ZX SPECTRUM 48K	**£10 ($18)**
ZX SPECTRUM 128K	**£40 ($74)**
ZX SPECTRUM+	**£35 ($65)**
ZX SPECTRUM +2	**£35 ($65)**
ZX SPECTRUM +3	**£40 ($74)**

SNK

NEO-GEO AES	**£150+ ($276+)**
NEO-GEO MVS	**£70 ($129)**
NEO-GEO CD	**£100 ($184)**
NEO-GEO CDZ	**£80+ ($147+)**
NEO-GEO POCKET	**£20 ($37)**
NEO-GEO POCKET COLOR	**£35 ($65)**

COLLECTOR'S CORNER

THIS MONTH'S COLLECTOR IS **BRUNO**, WHO HAILS FROM BELGIUM. WHEN HE'S NOT RUNNING HIS WEBSITES, HE'S CULTIVATING HIS IMPRESSIVE ARCADE COLLECTION



» My name's Bruno. I'm 36 years old and am the webmaster of **www.dragonslairfans.com** and **www.arcadelifestyle.net**.



» I have more than 45 arcade machines, mostly classics, and store them in my private game room called Nuno's Lair. Here's my beloved *Dragon's Lair* machine.



» Here's my pride and joy: a full-size *Galaxian* theatre. I had to build an extension just to fit it in. It's 5x5x2.40 metres in size and I travelled for 48 hours to pick it up.



» I also have this Sega *G-LOC: Air Battle* deluxe cabinet. Unfortunately it's not working at the moment but I already have my *Top Gun* outfit.



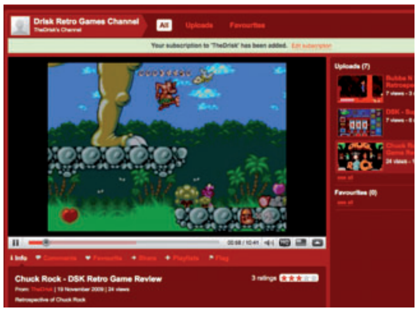
» Another major addition to my collection is a fully working *Computer Space*. I actually keep this in my living room along with an almost complete collection of **Retro Gamers**.



If you have a collection that you feel the rest of the **Retro Gamer** readership needs to know about, then contact us at **retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk** and we'll do our best to get you in the magazine.

MAILBAG

HAVE YOUR SAY… SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON THE ONLINE FORUM – **WWW.RETROGAMER.NET**



» Paul has just set up his own channel. Check it out at www.youtube.com/user/thedrisk.

YOUTUBE HEROES

Dear **Retro Gamer**,

I just wanted to say a big thank you for your magazine. I have been an avid reader since issue 2 back in the Live Publishing days and have bought every issue since.

The reason I am writing is that recently you had an article about people doing retro YouTube videos and I absolutely loved it. In fact, I was so inspired by it that I decided to do the same – search for 'TheDrisk' on YouTube to view them all.

Doing these videos has made me realise just how vital **Retro Gamer** is to the community with its knowledge of old games. Whenever I do a video I try to do some research, by trawling through the web and using my old mags and retro books that I have amassed over the years, but in most cases it's only your magazine that has the in-depth interviews and information about the games and companies that I need. So without your efforts I realised how little others and myself would know about the games we all grew up with and loved.

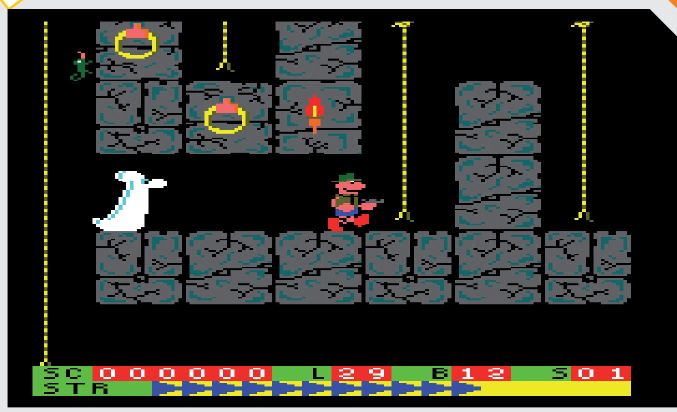
Anyway, enough of my ramblings, and I hope you enjoy my vids. I know they still aren't as professional as I would like, but I am improving with each one I do – *Super Frog* and *Chuck Rock* were the latest ones I did – and I am enjoying making them, which is really what it's all about…

Thanks again, and happy gaming,

Paul Driscoll, via email

Thanks for the kind words, Paul. We've certainly made the odd mistake every now and then, but we do pride ourselves on the fact that a lot of the articles we write just aren't available on the internet in any shape or form. Your videos are coming along nicely as well. We've just subscribed, so keep up the good work.

STAR LETTER



» [Amstrad CPC] Shaun wants to see more coverage on games like the *Roland* series. Consider it done.

UNSUNG HEROES

Dear **Retro Gamer**,

While I obviously adore your magazine, it does worry me that it's usually the more 'mainstream' heroes who get all the love. I have read countless articles on Sonic the Hedgehog, Super Mario, Lara Croft and Jet Set Willy, but this is just the small tip of a huge iceberg.

Classic 8-bit characters like Roland, the hero of Amsoft games; Horace; Sabre Man; Dizzy. The list is virtually endless and it's a pity that these lesser-known characters always get missed over the more obvious stars.

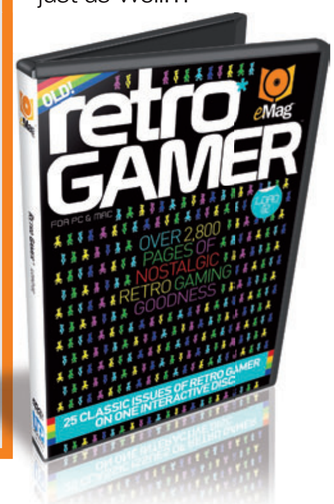
Please rectify this situation immediately as there are a lot of unsung heroes from our youth who just aren't receiving the status they deserve, as I'm sick to death of reading about *Jet Set Willy* and *Mario* all the time.

Shaun Potts, Warminster

Why does everyone always think that we run endless features on *Jet Set Willy*? Still, that aside, you make a fair point and we'll do our best to feature some of the characters you've mentioned in future issues. Have an eMag on us to calm your nerves.

WIN!

Every month, one lucky reader will receive a copy of our brand new eMag, **Retro Gamer Load 2**, a bargain if ever there was one. All you have to do is present a lucid, thought-provoking piece of literature that melts our souls. Failing that, something funny with swear words or something *Strider*-related will go down just as well…



THE SOUL STILL BURNS

Dear **Retro Gamer**,

I was somewhat saddened to see that you had reviewed the latest *Soul Calibur* and *Tekken* games, as well as *Ninja Gaiden Sigma 2* in your latest issue of the magazine. These games are NOT retro by any stretch of the imagination and shouldn't have been reviewed in your magazine under any circumstances. Please ensure that you don't review any PS3 or PSP games in the future as neither machine has anything to do with retro gaming. I've no problem with you covering titles like *Kirby* and Jeff Minter's new game, as they both have valid retro roots, but these other games you're covering are far too new



» Why spend additional money on other mags when you can get the definitive opinion here?

Next Month: David Crane



CONTACT US

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Email: retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk



BURNING QUESTION?

IF YOU HAVE a burning question, such as 'Will David Braben ever patch things up with Ian Bell?' or 'does Matthew Smith check in to hotels as Miner Willy?' then you should head straight over to our forum to post your questions to our interviewees. The best of the bunch will be answered and revealed in the next issue. To find out who we'll be interviewing in the coming months, visit the Retro Gamer forum now at www.retrogamer.net/forum

and simply don't belong in a magazine that's apparently dedicated to retro games. I would also appreciate it if you could stay away from newer consoles like the Dreamcast and PlayStation, as they are again far too new to belong in a magazine like **Retro Gamer**.

Yours disappointedly,

David Stone, Leeds

We're not quite sure what you're getting at, David. All the games you have mentioned are all long-running videogame franchises. Here at Retro Gamer, if a title has a heritage, even if it's a world away from past titles, we'll cover it. After all, many of us have the new machines, so surely it makes sense to get opinions from us – we've been playing games for years, after all – as opposed to single-format mags. As for your comments about the Dreamcast and PlayStation, we'd imagine that for every person that agrees with you you'll find one that doesn't.

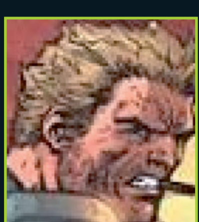
THE SPACE INVADER

Dear **Retro Gamer**,

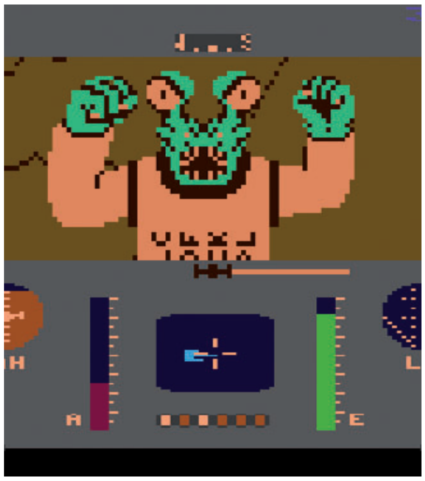
I went to Video Games Live in Gateshead last night (25 November) and failed at playing *Space Invaders* in front of everyone who was there. I've never been very good at *Space Invaders*, but at least I had the balls to get up on stage and do it. Anyway, it's been posted on YouTube in all its glory. I didn't post the video, but you can see it at **www.youtube.com/watch?v=7uH7BT00iyo**.

> "These games are NOT retro by any stretch of the imagination and shouldn't have been reviewed"

RETROBATE PROFILE



Name:	Matty D
Joined:	27 July 2008
Location:	Poole, UK
Occupation:	Postie
Website:	N/A
Fave Games System:	Nintendo Famicom



[Atari 5200] One day we'll be able to convince Darran that *Rescue On Fractalus!* never came out on the 2600. One day…

Enjoy, and I hope to see myself in the magazine. Failing, of course!

Spencer Guest

That's a great effort, Spencer, and you were so close to getting to the end of the wave as well. We unfortunately missed this year's Video Games Live event, but based on all the feedback that we've been receiving, it sounds like it was a cracking event. Here's hoping we get the chance to visit it next year. We may even do our own little videos.

ERROR ON FACTALUS

Dear **Retro Gamer**,

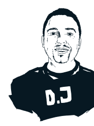
In your scary games article, you printed a picture of *Rescue On Fractalus!*, with the caption 'Atari 2600'. It was, in fact, released on the 5200, as well as the Atari home computers, but not the console. Just thought you should know. Oh, and the first *Silent Hill* on the original PlayStation was definitely the best. All the second one had going for it was nicer graphics and Pyramid Head!

Eric Ferrier, via email

Stuart was quick to point that error out as well, Eric, mainly because Darran had made the same mistake in a previous issue and vowed to never ever do it again. As for your thoughts on Konami's horror franchise, while the first version of *Silent Hill* is indeed very good, we'd pick the demented sequel any day of the week. Never has a videogame handled such dark themes with so much assuredness.

BEAT THE TEAM

Think you're good at retro games? See if you can beat the staff at some of their favourite titles

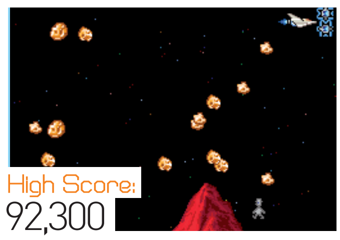


DARRAN

CHOSEN GAME: GRADIUS

Why I picked it: I was inspired after reading this month's feature.

Handy advice: Get a speed-up, then a multiple, then the missiles. You'll clear the first level easily.



High Score: 92,300

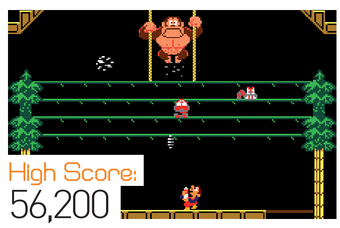


STUART

CHOSEN GAME: DONKEY KONG 3

Why I picked it: As it combines my two favourite things in the entire world: *Donkey Kong* and flowers.

Handy advice: Get DK to knock down the super bug spray, as it makes your life so much easier.



High Score: 56,200

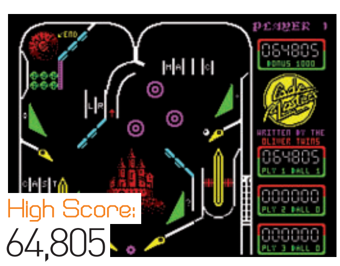


DAVID

CHOSEN GAME: ADVANCED PINBALL SIMULATOR

Why I picked it: I was in Manchester and saw a pinball machine…

Handy advice: Keep plugging away and try not to doze off. It's a cool high score game.



High Score: 64,805

CONTACT US

Snail Mail: Retro Gamer, Imagine Publishing, Richmond House, 33 Richmond Hill, Bournemouth, Dorset, BH2 6EZ **Email:** retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk

>> DREAMCAST ADVICE

Hi **Retro Gamer**,

I love the magazine. It just reminds me of a time when life was better. Anyway, I have been thinking about getting a Neo Geo for some time now, but the price and lack of RPGs has been putting me off it. After reading the articles on the Mega-CD and Dreamcast I decided to go for one of those, especially as Sega is one of my favourite companies. Anyway, I have been looking on eBay and Amazon and have found some cheap machines, but I was wondering if you could recommend any other sites to buy from. I also noticed that Amazon has a lot of Japanese and American games, but wasn't sure what cables I would need to play them. Could you steer me in the right direction, please?

Barry Walsh, via email

We'd be happy to, Barry. To be honest, the best places are the two you've already mentioned. Darran's been collecting PAL Dreamcast titles for quite a few months now and advises that you should start your collection off with a decent-sized bundle, as it will represent the best value for money. If you want to play US or Japanese games you'll need either a modded machine or a device like the DC-X, otherwise they won't work. If you're stuck for game ideas just pick any that were in issue 69's top 25.



>> [Dreamcast] Grab a couple of guns and a copy of *House Of The Dead 2* and play it on a CRT – no modern HDTVs for lightguns, unfortunately. Instant bliss.

JIMMY SPOTTED

Dear **Retro Gamer**,

I spotted Jimmy Hill enjoying a round of golf on page 77 of the recent issue. Do I win £5?

Nick Taylor-Jones, sent from my Spectrum +3

Congratulations, Nick. We'll send you out your fiver as soon as we've found the picture of Jimmy and can confirm your find. Expect your money sometime in 2011.

iFUN

Dear **Retro Gamer**,

I'd like to express my disappointment over your decision to drop the iPhone coverage from your reviews section. I know that you still cover the odd game, but it's not enough for me. The iPhone has proven to be an amazing machine for playing retro games on, and it's rather surprising that you're stopping the coverage when the device is getting stronger than ever. Please, please, please give us more iPhone coverage.

David Jones, via email

Well, David, we hear what you're saying, but a lot of readers were disgruntled with the amount of coverage we were offering on the iPhone so we scaled it back slightly to just a couple of our picks each month. Who knows, maybe we'll rectify this as more and more people get hold of this excellent games machine. You're right, though: it's a brilliant machine for retro fans, and it's only getting better.

DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

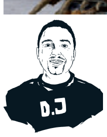
New Year Resolutions

Seeing as it's the beginning of a brand new year, Stuart, Steve and Darran have been making all sorts of bold promises. Darran has graciously offered to make far more cups of tea for the team instead of ordering Steve to make them, while Stuart is promising to supply his articles with captions. Steve, on the other hand, maintains that, like Mary Poppins, he's "practically perfect in every way" and as a result feels he doesn't actually have to do anything.

> "I spotted Jimmy Hill enjoying a round of golf on page 77 of the recent issue. Do I win £5?"

* CURRENTLY PLAYING

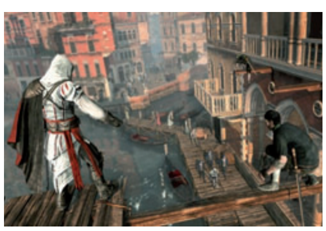




DARRAN

Monster Hunter Freedom Unite

This game is amazing. You hunt monsters, kill – or capture them if you're really skilled – then do it all over again. I've spent 55 hours in Capcom's world and it just keeps getting better and better.





STUART

Assassin's Creed II

This month I have been playing through the excellent *Assassin's Creed II* from Ubisoft. It's a great sequel that improves on all of those annoying niggles in the first game – and there were plenty of those, believe me.





DAVID

Assassin's Creed II

I thought the first *Assassin's Creed* was too repetitive, but I'm loving every second of the sequel. There is even a *Prince Of Persia*-style bit of platforming. Gripping story and lots of variety means I'm hooked.

retro GAMER

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JAMES HALEY

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☎ (UK) 0844 848 8412
☎ (Overseas) +44 1795 592 872
13 issue subscription UK – £51.90
13 issue subscription Europe – £70
13 issue subscription ROW – £80

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☎ 01752 345411

Distributed by Seymour Distribution, 2 East Poultry Avenue, London, EC1A 9PT ☎ 020 7429 4000

ISSN 1742-3155

From the forum

» To have your say visit www.retrogamer.net/forum

Every month, **Retro Gamer** asks a question on the forum and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know…

What is your favourite Dungeons & Dragons game?

felgekarp
I've never had any interest in these games but I've spent a good few hours on *Dungeons & Dragons Online*.

merman
Curse Of The Azure Bonds, one of the SSI Gold Box games based on *AD&D Forgotten Realms*. A deep, involving storyline – a team of adventurers attacked and knocked out wake up with strange blue tattoos on their arms, which can control them – and some fantastic artwork. It also came with the 'Adventurer's Journal' – at points you would be referred to a journal entry, which gave you more background detail on what was happening. At six disks for the C64 version, it was epic in scale.

thevulture
I've spent a lot of time playing *Dungeons & Dragons: Shadow Over Mystara* on MAME. Other than that, my run-ins with games based on *D&D* have been awful, including *Heroes Of The Lance* (C64) and *Dungeons & Dragons: Tactics* (PSP).

Blumf
Currently playing *Pools Of Radiance* via the PSPVice C64 emulator on the PSP and enjoying it, even with the virtual disk swapping.

Strangely enough, even though I'm a big fan of the paper and dice version of *D&D*, playing it every week, I don't often play *D&D* computer games. They just aren't the same.

Mayhem
Death Knights Of Krynn, probably the pinnacle of the Gold Box SSI releases on the C64. Solid engine, smart loading scheme, involving plotline, and a fair few surprises along the way. No wonder I played through it a fair few times to uncover all it had to offer.

Smurph
Easily *Shadow Over Mystara*, although it took me bloody ages to get any good at selecting items and magic. Very complicated for what is essentially *Golden Axe*.

imparks
What's the one on the Intellivision? *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons*, something or other… I remember playing that at a friend's house as a child. Quite enjoyed it at the time, and played it quite a bit. Can't remember much about it now.

Don't really like *Dungeons & Dragons* as such. I quite enjoyed *Baldur's Gate*. If it isn't *D&D* then I apologise for mentioning it.

Mire Mare
I really liked *Pool Of Radiance* on the C64. Can't remember the name of any others to be honest, but I'm going to say my favourite is *Orcs & Elves* on the DS. For me this relit a *D&D* flame. It's well-paced, complex enough, and retains that *D&D* atmosphere in terms of gameplay and the kitsch graphics. Great game that proves Elvish isn't dead.

Rinoa
Planescape: Torment. What a fantastic game indeed.

uglifruit
One can play *D&D* without a tabletop and polyhedral dice? I don't think so.

Protoman
Capcom at its finest: it has to be *Dungeons & Dragons: Shadow Over Mystara*, of course. Call me, "THE FIGHTER!"

Type2XS
Baldur's Gate and *Planescape: Torment*. *Torment* especially had writing that I wish would be the standard for modern games. Instead RPGs get dumbed down more and more.

Flat Eric
I loved *Dungeons & Dragons: Heroes*. It's a funny hack-and-slay game, especially with three friends in co-op mode. It's not a milestone, but we had a really nice time with it.

scapegoat
While I liked the Gold Box games, especially the *Krynn* series and the *Beholder* games. It wasn't until *Planescape: Torment* that I felt totally immersed in a *D&D* game. It still has one of the best scripts I've ever come across and I just loved playing it again recently.

Denny Haynes
Has to be *Dungeons & Dragons: Shadow Over Mystara* at the arcade. Superb gameplay and very addictive. Oh, and it's a pocket vampire where money is concerned.

lanky316
I always loved *Warriors Of The Eternal Sun*. Often see it forgotten. *D&D Online* could have been so much more but was a nice little MMORPG.

Jeremiah Jones
Eye Of The Beholder on the SNES, which provided 3D gaming before 3D gaming took over everything.

YOUR OPINION PLEASE

BEST SONIC GAME?

Freestyler *Sonic* on the Mega Drive. Completed the entire thing without dying once. Even got all the Chaos Emeralds! *Sonic Unleashed* on the Xbox 360 is a horrible game.

Megamixer The original by far. The unforgettable Green Hill Zone music…

SpiffierRabbit Would have to say *Sonic 2*. Expanded on the original, decent two-player challenge. But *Sonic Adventure* on the DC would be a close second despite its flaws.

Grizzly I would say *Sonic 3 & Knuckles*, but *Sonic 2* just wins out for Sky Chase!

Rayne It has to be *Sonic 2*, the greatest ever *Sonic* platformer, in my opinion. It also happens to be the first videogame I ever owned.

DISCWORLD

Spooky What's your opinion of the *Discworld* games?

Dudley They are very good but have a nasty tendency towards really illogical puzzle solutions.

CharlieWolf I had the second one for the PSone; one of the first games I got for the system and one of the few I actually got to use my PlayStation mouse with. I enjoyed it a lot, although some of the puzzles were just silly.

yethboth I played a playable demo of *Discworld 2* on the PlayStation and it was quite interesting and humorous, but I personally prefer *Broken Sword* as I was really gripped by the storyline, puzzles, music and animation.

nokgod Got all three of the PSone games and love them to bits, although I do agree that some of the puzzles are just insane and make your head hurt!

SF III: THE DEBATE CONTINUES…

SpiffierRabbit Is *Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike* REALLY that good? I really love the *Street Fighter* series, but I honestly think that *Super Street Fighter II X* (DC version) is the 'purest' version of the game.

Megamixer Darran will probably be along shortly to give you a Shoryuken…

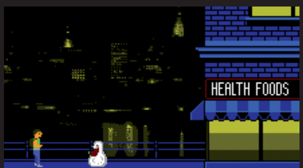
PacSuit Sure, *Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike* is a good fighting game, but I prefer other fighting games over it, mostly the *Virtua Fighter* series.

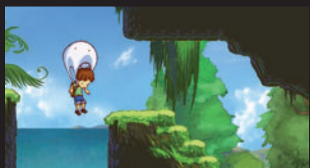
Antiriad2097 I'd apply the 'overrated' tag to the whole of the *Street Fighter* series. Don't like it, have never liked it, I would much rather play any other fighting game.

Old vs NEW

Each month, we'll be finding out if the classics are better than their successors. This month, which *A Boy And His Blob* is your favourite?

A Boy And His Blob (NES Version) | **A Boy And His Blob (Wii Version)**





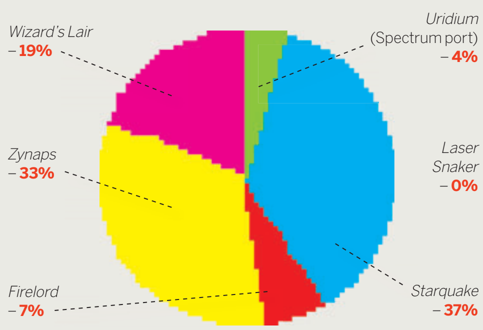
10% | 90%

NonShinyGoose
Playing this game always makes me fancy a bag of jellybeans. I have no idea why…

Team Alfie
WayForward's Wii game is more fun today than the original was

HOT TOPIC

Best Stephen Crow game?



"*Starquake* for me. The graphics were just beautifully crafted" **– ipmarks**

"Thoroughly enjoy *Uridium*, *Zynaps*, and *Wizard's Lair*, but I think his best game is *Starquake*" **– Sputryk**

"*Wizards Lair* for me, as there's great variety in the levels. The caverns are my favourite" **– sirclive1**

retro GAMER

DURELL

We speak to the coders behind some of the Spectrum's most inventive games



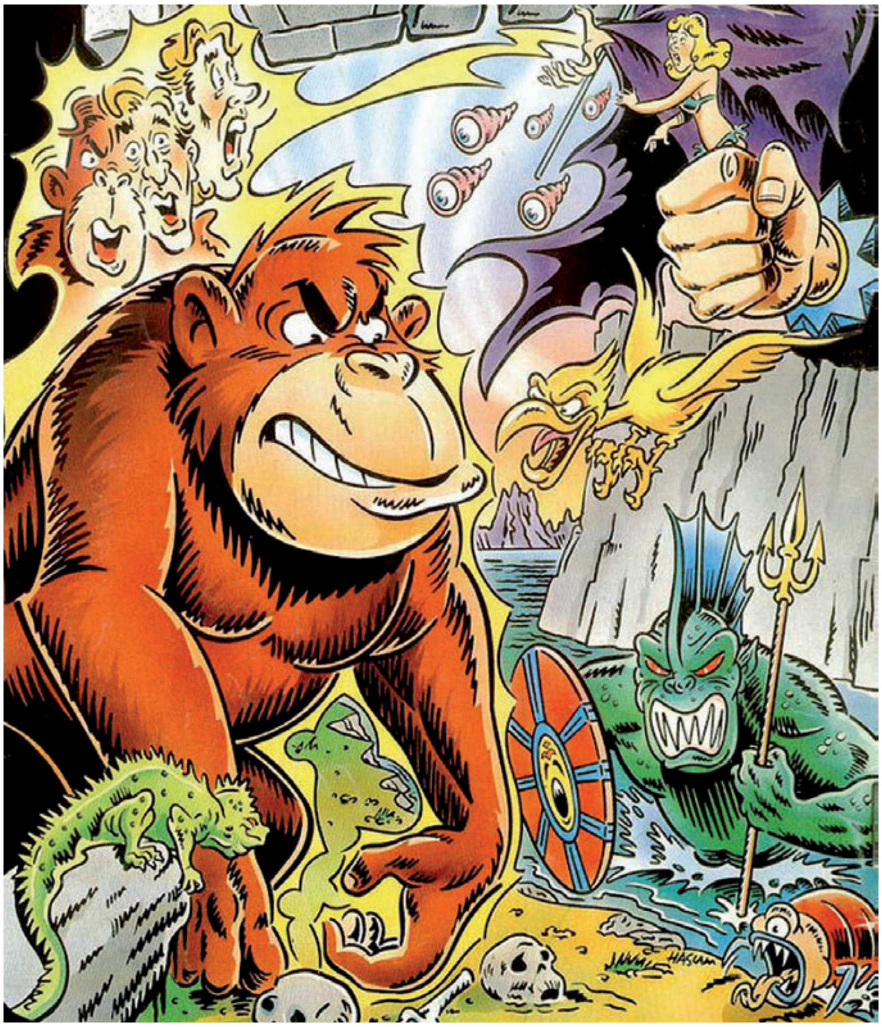
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OTHER EXCITING FEATURES

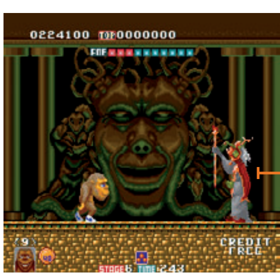
- He's one of videogames' earliest heroes, but just how much do you know about Ultimate's Sabreman?
- Not every arcade game was converted to home systems. Discover the coin-op gems that you may have missed
- David Crane takes time out of his hectic iPhone schedule to discuss the good old days

END/GAME

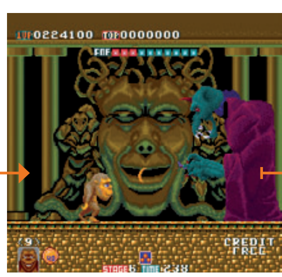


TOKI

With a new high-def remake in the works, there's never been a better time to look at the primate escapades of Toki



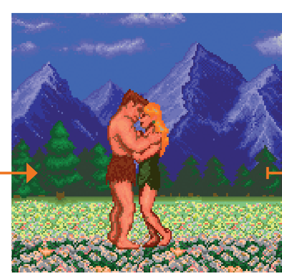
SCREEN 1
Determined to return to his normal form, man-turned-ape Toki finally tracks down the evil sorcerer who transmogrified him and kidnapped his precious beloved.



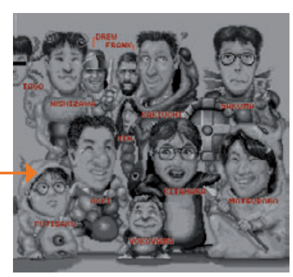
SCREEN 2
Even as a mere ape, Toki proves to be more than a match for the warlock. After much swearing and questioning of *Toki*'s collision detection, evil is defeated.



SCREEN 3
A triumphant Toki punches the air and is immediately hit by a bolt of energy. Worry not, though, for our hero is returned to his former glory.



SCREEN 4
Toki is reunited with his girlfriend and the two share a tender moment. They go on to kiss – complete with comical hearts – and the end credits roll. Lovely.



SCREEN 5
Just as we're getting to the end of the credits, we're treated to an image of the developers, all kitted out as various characters from the game.